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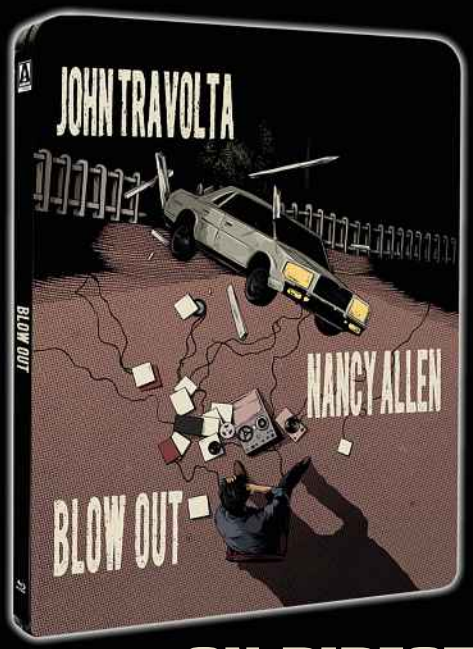

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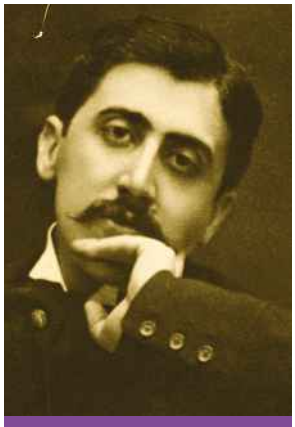

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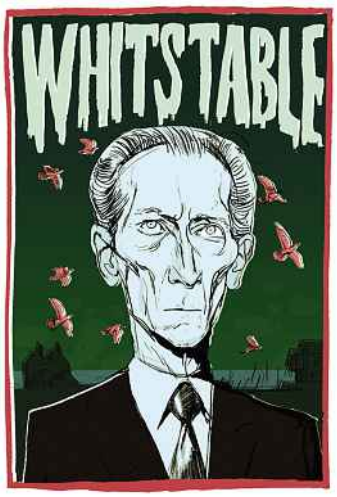
editorial

The gentle man of horror

This month we celebrate the life and legacy of a genuine film legend – the actor Peter Cushing, whose centenary falls on 26 May this year. Afficianados of the cinema of the fantastic keep a special place in their hearts for Cushing, whose appearances in over 90 films – as such iconic figures as Baron Frankenstein, Van Helsing and Sherlock Holmes – made him one of the best loved actors Britain has ever produced. Cushing was an impeccable professional on both stage and screen, and lifted many a mediocre film with a memorable performance; but the affection – indeed, love – that he inspired in audiences is something else again, far harder to quantify or explain. It's that sense of something special – perhaps unique – about Cushing that inspired celebrated screenwriter Stephen Volk to produce a new novella based on a tragic period in the actor's life. As the author of classic fortean mockumentary *Ghostwatch*, Stephen is no stranger to these pages, and we're glad to be able to share his very personal response (as well as those of the many other writers who have contributed) to the life and work of Peter Cushing. It will strike a chord with anyone who cherishes *The Curse of Frankenstein*, *Brides of Dracula* or *Beyond the Grave*, and for those of us who had the privilege of meeting the man himself will stir memories of someone who seemed to embody the virtues of a vanished age – the 'gentle man of horror'.



QUINTON WINTER

Stephen's new novella is called *Whitstable*, and is set in the Kentish seaside town that became Cushing's adopted home. To round out the picture, artist Quinton Winter presents his own archive of odd goings-on, local lore and reports of strange phenomena in 'Weird Whitstable' – from a giant fox and a cat-snatching seagull to ghostly smugglers and ABCs...

BEYOND OUR KEN

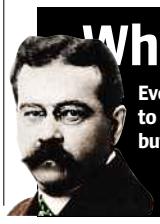
Meanwhile, a small-screen legend – actor Bill Roache, who has played *Coronation Street's* Ken Barlow for a staggering 53 years – has been in the news again. Last year, we reported on his pronouncements concerning Doomsday 2012 (**FT294:17**, **300:38**); now, he has caused another media rumpus by speculating about how karma and reincarnation might affect people's current lives – specifically those of victims of sexual abuse. The press suggested he was suffering some kind of 'mid-life crisis' (even though the actor will be 81 this month), but this was not the sudden outburst that some sources portrayed it to be. *FT* columnist Jenny Randles has known Roache since for decades, and points out that for anyone who has followed his pursuit of spiritual enlightenment, this latest episode will come as no surprise.

Jenny first met the *Corrie* actor when they both attended an astrology class back in the 1970s (Bill apparently tested out his new techniques on the soap's cast). Then, he stunned the audience at a Manchester UFO conference where Jenny was lecturing by standing up and asking a question that revealed a considerable understanding of the subject. As Jenny says, "his fascination with a wide range of forteana is anything but a recent interest. In fact it has been a lifelong quest".

In 1988, she interviewed Roache, who revealed his interest in Eastern religious doctrines concerning "the nature of the Universe" and described himself as a "cosmic student… continuously discovering new things", adding that "only people who study the paranormal can really comprehend what there is to understand about it. You need to enquire, and keep enquiring, until you build up a store of knowledge and information".

"I felt that he had his head screwed on right," says Jenny. "I smiled on noting that he quickly sussed how the media could not cope with such thinking. I have had similar adventures and we were able to empathise over this problem of perception. Bill observed: '[The media] just want to make it sensationalist and fun. Yet there is so much more to it than that, if only they could see… They either will not look, or simply are not capable of looking, deeper into what the paranormal stands for and implies.' Throughout our discussion he revealed a sincere, enquiring mind whose views are not based on any casual infatuation but a genuine attempt to understand how the Universe works. People are, of course, free to agree or disagree with his thinking, but it would be wrong to perceive him other than as someone who for decades has been asking questions without merely believing all that he reads. He has spent a lifetime seeking credible answers to topics that tabloid journalists rarely have the time or the inclination to explore. But they still love to poke fun at anyone who dares to do precisely that."

DAVID SUTTON
BOB RICKARD
PAUL SIEVEKING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Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!
SEE PAGE 78

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Believe it or not...

Credulity among registered US voters and ignorance among UK teenagers

MINORITY REPORT

In a survey of 1,247 registered American voters in March 2013, conducted through automated telephone interviews, Public Policy Polling revealed the percentages of those who accept minority beliefs, including some of the hoary old chestnuts of conspiracy theory.

In a stunning endorsement of David Icke, 4% believe that shape-shifting lizards control the world, while 7% are "not sure". 29% believe "aliens" exist; participants were not asked whether these unspecified aliens had visited Earth, although 21% believe a UFO crashed at Roswell in 1947, and the US government covered it up. 13% believe that Barack Obama is the Antichrist, while the same percentage is "not sure". 7% think the Moon landing was faked and 14% believe in the existence of Bigfoot.

28% believe a secretive power elite with a globalist agenda is conspiring to eventually rule the world through an authoritarian world government or New World Order. 5% think the exhaust seen in the sky behind aircraft consists of chemicals sprayed by the government for sinister reasons, while 9% believe that the government adds fluoride to the water supply, not for dental health, but for more nefarious purposes. 15% believe media or the government adds secret mind-controlling technology to television broadcast signals; the same proportion thinks that the pharmaceutical industry is in league with the medical industry to "invent" new diseases in order to make money. 20% believe there is a link between childhood vaccines and autism.

A majority – 51% – think that Lee Harvey Oswald did not act alone in killing President Kennedy; only 25% agree with the official version. A mere 6% think that Osama bin Laden is still alive. 37% think global warming is a hoax, though there is a marked partisan divide over this, with 61% of Republicans agreeing, but only 12% of Democrats. (The complication of natural versus man-made climate change is not addressed.) 14% think the CIA was instrumental in distributing crack to US inner cities in the 1980s (this percentage rises to 22 among black respondents). 28% think Saddam Hussein was involved in 9/11, while 11% believe that the US government knowingly allowed the attacks to happen. (Did Saddam and Dubya plan the whole thing between them at some Bilderberg lizard conference? Fiendish!) A more sober 44% believe the Bush administration intentionally misled the public about the possibility of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq to promote the Iraq war.

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

4% believe that shape-shifting lizards control the world

Finally, 5% believe Paul McCartney actually died in a car crash in 1966 and was secretly replaced by a lookalike so the Beatles could continue; 14% of respondents are "not sure". *Public Policy Polling press release, 2 April 2013.*

A quotation from the American historian Wallace Stegner seems appropriate here: "Verifiable knowledge makes its way slowly, and only under cultivation; but fable has burrs and feet and claws and wings and an indestructible sheath like weed-seed, and can be carried almost anywhere without benefit of soil or water."

HISTORY TODAY

A survey of 2,000 teenagers (11-to-16-year-olds) by hotel chain Premier Inn revealed a surreal vision of our Island Story. Henry VIII's wives included Delia Smith, Jerry Hall and Camilla Duchess of Cornwall. The plague (which bore off thousands in 1665) was really a heavy metal band. Television builder Nick Knowles constructed the Egyptian pyramids and William Shakespeare was chairman of the BBC. Many were unaware of the Gunpowder Plot or which countries were involved in World War II – although they suggested that British Prime Ministers during that time of national emergency included Bruce Forsyth, Rod Stewart and Alan Sugar. One in 10 thought Arsenal's Emirates stadium was built before Westminster Abbey and St Paul's Cathedral. Anne Frank was an American chat show host. Emmeline Pankhurst was either an X Factor finalist or the owner of Miss Selfridge.

A third of those polled didn't know that London was in the south-east of England; 91 per cent were aware that last year's Olympics were held in the capital, although a confused one in 20 thought it was in Paris. One should always bear in mind that absurd answers can usually be relied upon in these surveys by ridiculous multiple choice questions; in any case, deliberate sabotage by those polled should not be underestimated. *Independent, 21 Mar; D.Mail, 23 Mar 2013.*

NOT FROM THESE PARTS

Wandering walrus on Orkney beach

PAGE 8

MIRROR, MIRROR

Who's that spectre staring back at me?

PAGE 14

THANKS TO VESUVIUS

New exhibition of intimate relics from Pompeii

PAGE 22

Monkey shines

Mystery primate (or tripod?) seen in Dorset

Terri Leigh Cox, 17, saw something hunched over and bounding around on all fours 100 yards (90m) from her bedroom window in Dorchester, Dorset, and took this photo on her mobile phone. She said that the park's visitor, which she insisted was not a dog or cat, then ran up a tree and out of sight. Shaun Bessant, her boyfriend, dashed out to investigate but found no sign of the "monkey-like" creature. The park is about 10 miles (16km) from the Monkey World attraction in Wool, but none of its primates was missing.

The creature "looked about the size of a small gorilla," said Miss Cox, who is studying health and social care at college. "It was walking like one as well, using its arms as feet. It was definitely a monkey because you could tell by its hunched back and the way it scampered across the field and up the tree. It was not a black dog. I have no idea what the monkey was doing there. It could have escaped if someone was keeping it as a pet." The image of the creature is too blurred to identify – in fact, some suggest it isn't a creature at all, but a tripod or stool. *D.Telegraph, Sun, 26 Mar 2013.*

BNPS

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

MAN ARRESTED AFTER FIGHT WITH STOP SIGN

San Francisco Chronicle, [no date].

Dragons praise new luxury hotel for cats

Herts Advertiser, 25 Oct 2012.

Picture of success: Pope named top cartoonist

Canberra Times, 19 Nov 2012.

Dung admits making a mess

<i>, 23 Oct 2012.

Scientists set out vision of putting reality to the test

D.Telegraph, 27 Oct 2012.

Grasshoppers learn to shout

Western Daily Press, 14 Nov 2012.

FOX SELLS PIGS

Sun, 1 Nov 2012.

Vatican battles against invading porcupines

Catholic Herald, 31 Aug 2012.

HAWAII IS FOUND ON MARS

Sun, 1 Nov 2012.

SIDELINES...

FICKLE FINGER

A terrified 64-year-old man in Padua thought he had been sent a Mafia warning when a severed finger landed on his doormat. He called the police, who connected the incident to a leaflet deliverer who had been admitted to a local hospital. "The pensioner has a very high letterbox and the leaflet guy had to jump up to reach it," said a spokesman. "His hand got stuck and when he came down he left a finger behind." *Sun, 2 Mar 2013.*

DANGEROUS LAUNDRY

Nicola Boulton and her daughter Claire escaped a blaze at their house in Leicester on 9 January after recently laundered tea towels spontaneously combusted. There were at least six similar fires in the UK in 2011, all caused, it is thought, by a reaction between the heat and residual grease (or scented oils) on the towels. *D.Telegraph, 6 Aug, 16 Nov 2011; Leicester Mercury, 10 Jan 2013.*

BLOWN UNDER

Joshua Blackaby, six, and fellow pupils from his primary school in Alvaston, Derby, launched 300 helium-filled balloons together in December. Two months later, he received a letter from Millie, a girl in East Kurrajong, near Sydney in Australia, saying she had found his balloon and its tag in a tree in her garden. It has travelled about 10,500 miles (17,000km). *D.Mirror, 4 Mar 2013.*

MARTIN ROSS

Recent reliquary news

Saint's arm Down Under; Turin Shroud genuine (again)

TALK TO THE HAND...

The right forearm of St Francis Xavier toured Australia last year in its silver reliquary, arriving in Sydney on 16 September and going back there on 4 December, before returning to Rome. This is the arm with which the co-founder of the Jesuits baptised and blessed thousands, the hand with which he tended and held the sick and the dying.

The celebrated Spaniard died of fever in December 1552 and was buried on the Chinese island of Shangchuan, but two months later his body was exhumed, at which time it was found to be incorrupt. It was then taken to Portuguese Malacca, whereupon, we are told, the plague which had been raging there abruptly ceased, blind people were given their sight and sick people healed. After nine months, it was moved to the Basilica of Bom Jesus in Goa, the scene of Xavier's original and highly successful missionary work.

The right forearm was detached by the Jesuits' Superior General, Claudio Acquaviva, in 1614 and taken to Rome, where it is usually displayed in a silver reliquary at the main Jesuit church, Il Gesù. Another of Xavier's arm bones was taken to Macau where it was kept in a silver reliquary. It was destined for Japan, but religious persecution there persuaded the church to keep it in Macau.

Recently, the relic was moved to the Sacred Art Museum there. The rest of his body remained in Goa and was placed in a glass container encased in a silver casket in 1637. Every 10 years it is exposed for veneration; in 2005, over two million people came to honour him.

Xavier was canonised in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV, at the same time as Ignatius Loyola. Xavier's tomb in the Basilica of Bom Jesus is in the town of Old Goa, once the Portuguese capital of the province before being abandoned in the 18th century due to the plague. Paul Sieveking, *FT's* founding co-editor, went there in 1977, and found little more than a group of magnificent baroque churches in the jungle. *Queensland Times, 15 Nov; Ipswich (Queensland) News, 21 Nov 2012.*

CATHOLIC WEEKLY

LEFT: St Francis Xavier relic on show in the chapel of The Polding Centre, the HQ of the Archdiocese of Sydney.

Fanti concluded that the Shroud cloth dated to 300 BC–AD 400

TURIN SHROUD 'GENUINE'

There has been yet another twist in the endless debate over the authenticity of the Turin Shroud. Carbon-dating of fibres from the famous relic, carried out at three laboratories in 1988, gave a date of 1260 to 1390, indicating mediæval manufacture. The official report stated that the fibre sample "came from a single site on the main body of the Shroud away from any patches or charred areas"; but it was nevertheless suggested that the results were skewed by water and fire damage, as the fibres might have come from a repair carried out following the fire of 1532 while the Shroud was in a chapel in Chambéry, capital of Savoy. In fact, at least four scholarly articles since 1988 have contended that the dating samples may not have been representative of the whole Shroud.

According to a book published on Good Friday this year, *Il Mistero della Sindone* ("The Mystery of the Shroud") by Giulio Fanti, a professor of mechanical and thermal measurement at Padua University in northern Italy, and journalist Saverio Gaeta, the Shroud could have been made during the lifetime of Jesus after all. Prof Fanti and colleagues used infra-red light and Raman spectroscopy (the measurement of radiation intensity though wavelengths) to analyse fibres taken from the Shroud at the time of the carbon-dating tests in 1988, and compared them to samples of cloth dating from between 3000 BC and the modern era. They concluded that the 14ft (4.3m) Shroud cloth dates from between 300 BC and AD 400.

The Vatican has always refused to pronounce whether the Shroud is genuine or not. It was last seen in public in 2010, and was shown 'live' on television for only the second time in history on Easter Saturday. The last televised "ostentation", as a public exposure of the Shroud is known, was 40 years ago. It is not due to be exhibited again until 2025. In a special video message, Pope Francis declared: "The face in the Shroud conveys a great peace. This tortured body expresses a sovereign majesty." *D.Mail, 28 Mar; D.Telegraph, 29 Mar, 2 April 2013.*

Wartime tricks

A leak that wasn't and dastardly deeds

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Agatha Christie, whose character Bletchley was named after a railway stop.

A curious story about World War II is revealed in a new book, *The Codebreakers of Station X* by Michael Smith (Shire Books), about the secret decryption work carried out at Bletchley Park in Buckinghamshire. Agatha Christie's novel *N or M?*, published in late 1941, features her detective duo Tommy and Tuppence – married couple Thomas and Prudence Beresford – who are engaged in tracking down German spies in Britain. One of the characters is a Major Bletchley, an old Indian Army major they meet during their investigation, who claims to know everything about what is really going on in the war. As Christie was a close friend of Alfred Dilwyn ('Dilly') Knox, a leading British codebreaker, MI5 was very worried that the character's inside knowledge of the progress of the war was based on the Bletchley codebreakers' knowledge of German plans.

The team at Bletchley Park had broken the German Enigma machine ciphers, allowing Churchill and his military commanders to know what the Germans planned. It is generally agreed that Bletchley Park helped shorten the war by as much as two years, thereby saving many lives. The Germans believed that the Enigma code was unbreakable, so it was vital to ensure that only a very few people knew what was going on at Bletchley. To make matters worse, Knox had just broken the Enigma cipher used by the German secret service officers running spies into Britain.

Refugees thought they had arrived in Germany

MI5 questioned Knox, who insisted Christie couldn't possibly know about Bletchley. Investigators were afraid that if they or the police questioned the author it was bound to get out, so Knox agreed to ask her himself. He had to avoid giving anything away, but he invited her to his house at Courn's Wood, Naphill, Buckinghamshire, and – over tea and scones – asked her why she had chosen to name her character 'Bletchley'. She replied: "Bletchley? My dear, I was stuck there on my way by train from Oxford to London and took revenge by giving the name to one of my least lovable characters." MI5 had panicked for nothing. *D.Telegraph, Guardian, 4 Feb 2013.*

OPERATION STONE

Czech investigators want to track down surviving organisers of a fiendish Soviet-era ruse known as Operation Stone, which ran from 1948 to 1951. Although the communist government classified it as top secret, some 10,000 pages of documents have survived.

False checkpoints were created near the Czech–German border with an attention to detail worthy of a film set to trick people into thinking they had made it to safety. There were US flags, US uniforms, US newspapers scattered on desks, and, at one faux-checkpoint, a US military bus visible through a window. Once would-be refugees were comfortable in what they thought was Germany, a Czech secret policeman posing as an American intelligence officer asked them to write down all their contacts back home and anyone who disagreed with Soviet policies.

In one case, an "American" officer shared whisky with an escaper in order to make him more relaxed before he unwittingly betrayed his friends. Many received harsh sentences from Stalinist judges. The defector Josef Frolik claimed the Prague Spring of 1968 should have happened 15 years earlier, but the rounding up of dissidents put it back several years. Igor Lukas, a Czech-American historian, said that at least two organisers of Operation Stone were still alive "and living in luxury". *D.Telegraph, thetruthnews.info, 9 Aug 2012.*

SIDELINES...

CANNY CAT

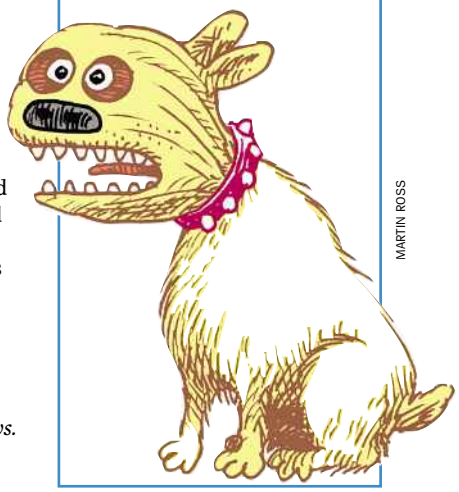
A reader wrote to Dr James Le Fanu about her cat Tinker, which insisted on accompanying the family caravanning every weekend, "if we were not to be sent to Coventry on our return". One day, Tinker fought not to be placed in the caravan, so they left without her. Ten minutes into the journey on a downward hill, caravan parted company with car and crashed at speed into a fence. As for Tinker, "when the new caravan arrived, she resumed her weekend trips." *D.Telegraph, 7 Jan 2013.*

ORIENTAL CHALLENGE

The first volume of a Chinese version of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939) has sold out. Dai Congrong, 41, took eight years to translate a third of the complex opus, which few English speakers manage to struggle through. *Metro, 1 Feb 2013.*

FATAL FACELIFT

Mr Yu, a Chinese dog breeder, paid £140 for his Tibetan mastiff to have a facelift to make it more attractive to owners looking for a breeding partner; but the mastiff died of heart failure, possibly linked to anæsthetic. Mr Yu is suing the animal hospital for £90,000, the price he claims to have paid for the dog. In 2011, a Chinese coal baron spent £945,000 on a Tibetan mastiff, reputedly making it the world's most expensive dog. *D.Telegraph, 14 Feb 2013.*



MARTIN ROSS

SIDELINES...

LATE CANCELLATION

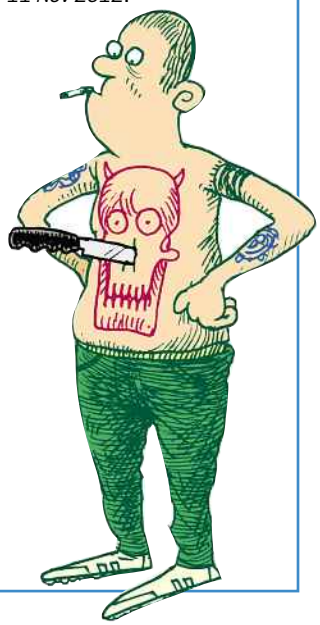
Konrad Müller killed Heinrich Stucki near the Swiss town of Näfels in 1357. To save his soul, he gave a lamp to the local church and promised to provide oil from his walnut trees – and later, candles – through all eternity. All subsequent landowners honoured the debt – currently 70 Swiss francs (£45) a year – but the current owner won a court ruling this January that, after 655 years, he need pay no longer. *Sunday Times, 13 Jan 2013.*

TWITTER POWER

Last summer, a derelict Saudi Arabian hospital drew hundreds of ghost-hunters who believed it to be haunted. The fascination with Riyadh's Irqa Hospital, which treated Gulf War combatants in 1991, began with tweeted rumours, which saw youths smash windows and start fires. *<i> 7 June 2012.*

DYEING FOR A FIGHT

Police in Thailand arrested a 'sorcerer' tattooist after a series of brawls involving teenagers who thought his tattoos made them invincible. A police spokesman in Kalasin said the teenagers wanted to test whether the tattoos 'worked' or not. They used sticks and knives. Asked if anyone had been injured, he said: "Every single one". *Sunday Times, 11 Nov 2012.*



MARTIN ROSS

Not from around here

A round-up of critters turning up far from their native lands

MARK WARREN / NORTH RONALDSAY BIRD OBSERVATORY

ABOVE: The young – and disoriented – male walrus which landed in the Orkneys for a rest before taking off again.

● A walrus turned up on a small island in Orkney for the first time in more than 25 years. The animal, thought to be a young male, was spotted on the shoreline of North Ronaldsay on 3 March. It was first seen by Mark Warren, 32, the assistant warden of the North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory and Guest House. "At first I thought it was a dead whale, so I threw a stone at it and it woke up," he said. Walruses, which can weigh up to 1.5 tons, usually stay within the Arctic Circle in Canada, Alaska, Russia and Greenland. The last one seen this far south was spotted on Eynhallow in August 1986. Experts said the latest wanderer was "resting" after becoming "disoriented". It returned to the sea on 4 March. Ross Flett of Orkney Seal Rescue said it had travelled at least 1,600 miles (2,600km) and looked ready to breed. He added: "I doubt he will find love here. It's bad enough for humans on North Ronaldsay." *D.Telegraph, 4+5 Mar 2013.*

"I doubt he will find love here. It's bad enough for humans"

● Last September, authorities in Kashmir launched a hunt for a "large, mysterious" lizard, which had appeared in the village of Lawaypora on the outskirts of the capital, Srinagar, causing panic. Rumours were rife across the city that "a great African lizard" had appeared; some suggested it was a giant carnivorous Komodo dragon. "We have laid a snare at the mouth of a septic trench as the residents said the creature went inside it and had not appeared since then," said Abdul Rouf, wildlife warden at the nearby Hokersar wetland. "If we go by what the villagers described, then I think it is a monitor lizard, which is usually 3ft [90cm] long. These creatures move around at night and we are hopeful we'll catch it," he added. Such creatures live in hot desert areas and are not usually found in this Himalayan region where a harsh winter can last for several months. "The average size of lizards in Kashmir is 1in by 4in [2.5–10cm], almost the size of a human palm," said Rouf. Although it was not known how the creature reached the valley, authorities suggested that it might have jumped into a truck heading north to Kashmir. *Hindustan Times, 22 Sept 2012.*

● Earlier this year, police on the Costa del Sol in Spain were searching for a 7ft (2m) reptile, believed to be an alligator, spotted in waterways near the popular

tourist resort of Mijas. The fugitive, dubbed the Costa Croc, was first sighted in February near a golf course in Marbella. In mid-March, officers from Seprona, a Civil Guard nature protection unit, confirmed the presence of the reptile after finding its footprints in undergrowth beside the Majada Vieja, an area of man-made lakes just inland from the coast. Red danger signs were posted across the zone, a popular walking spot bordering the private golf course, warning: "Grave danger. Crocodile on the loose." Enrique Prieto, manager of the crocodile park in nearby Torremolinos, was called in to help identify the fugitive. He said the tracks had most likely been made by an alligator aged between 12 and 18 years that had probably been released into the wild by an exotic pet collector after growing too big and becoming unmanageable. *D.Telegraph, 22 Mar 2013.*

● Living up to the celebrated urban legend (which *might* be based on actual incidents), an alligator is said to have crawled out of an overflowing drain during a storm in New York last August. Shocked shoppers fled after the 18in (46cm) reptile was spotted slithering along the pavement in Astoria, Queens. Police, who lassoed the beast and carted it off before it was taken to an animal sanctuary, could not say where it had come from. "It could have been dumped from a car or it could have come out of a sewer," said a police spokesman. *Sun, 24 Aug 2012.*

● At 3.30am on Sunday, 14 October, a wallaby hopped in front of a taxi on the A603 near Barton in rural Cambridgeshire. Driver Thomas Tarjan, 32, said: "As I had my hazard lights on, several taxis stopped. When I explained, they just asked me if I was all right. The girls in the back called the police. They didn't believe us." However, when officers saw this picture taken on her camera phone by passenger Jessica Wiltshire, 20, they hunted the marsupial down. It was released back into the wild on the advice of experts, who believed it was a descendant of a troupe that escaped from Whipsnade Zoo in Bedfordshire 60 years ago. Three days later, however, it was found to be a pet that had escaped as William Fernando, 17, an exotic pet dealer, was preparing to send it to Germany. Specialists from Shepreth Wildlife Park were trying to recapture the animal. It was spotted by dozens of people as it hopped through gardens, farms and woodland around Barton. *D.Mail, D.Mirror, Metro, 17 Oct; Times, 20 Oct 2012.*

● A Reeves's pheasant was spotted in Perthshire by bird watcher Arthur Bruce while driving. The species, native to China, probably escaped from captivity – but who knows? *D.Telegraph, 21 Mar 2013.*

GEOFFREY ROBINSON / REX FEATURES

ABOVE: The wallaby snapped in rural Cambridgeshire. **TOP:** A Reeves's pheasant, native to China but living in Scotland.

SIDELINES...

LOVELORN THWARTED

Tourists who leave notes beneath the balcony where Juliet is said to have been wooed by Romeo now face a fine of up to £400 as Verona bans the tradition. The notes, often stuck to the wall with chewing gum, appealed to the fictional heroine to cast a lucky spell on the visitors' love lives. The former inn probably once belonged to the Cappello family, possibly the model for the Capulets of Shakespeare's play. *D.Telegraph, 10 Nov 2012.*

SPURNED SPERM

Shy student Gou Wen, 22, of Chongqing, China, sent a girl a bottle of his sperm to declare his love. Zeng Lin, 19, thought it was face moisturiser and had used half of it before she got suspicious and called the police. Gou apologised and was ordered to pay Zeng £200 compensation. "I'll find another way to show my love," he said. *Sun, 6 Mar 2013.*

NATIONAL TREASURE

Britain's oldest resident turned 130 last November. Thomas the tortoise was already 40 in 1922, when given to Grace Hilditch, whose father was friends with a reptile keeper at London Zoo. The tortoise was pulled from the rubble of a German bomb in Ilford, Essex, in 1945 and was inherited by Ms Hilditch's cousin June Le Gallez in Guernsey in 1978. Ms Le Gallez discovered Thomas was female when she took her to the vet. *D.Mail, Metro, 26 Nov 2012.*

ARBOREAL CUCKOLD

An Indian known only as Sanjay, 25, found his wife in bed with a neighbour in Mumbai. The couple returned to their home village – Ramgaon in Uttar Pradesh – but when the wife insisted on returning to Mumbai, Sanjay climbed a guava tree and refused to come down until she returned to him and apologised. At the time of the report, he had been up the tree without a break for nine months, surviving on guava fruit and food handed up by kinsfolk. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 20 Dec 2012.*

SIDELINES...

CAT BURGLAR

Throughout November 2012, 26 sets of house and car keys vanished from houses in Stoke Newington, north London. It wasn't until Kirsten Alexander spotted her cat Milo coming through the cat flap with a set of keys dangling from its magnetic collar that the mystery was solved. (The collar triggered a security cat flap.) Milo had been wandering from house to house through neighbours' standard cat flaps. *D.Telegraph, Metro, 11 Dec 2012.*

CROCS AT LARGE

About 15,000 crocodiles escaped from Rakwena Crocodile Farm in northern South Africa following heavy rain. The owners were forced to open the gates to prevent a storm surge after the nearby Limpopo River rose. The animals are bred for their skin. A number were recaptured as the waters fell, many trapped in trees; but at least half remained on the loose. One turned up on a school rugby pitch 75 miles (120km) away. *[R] 25 Jan 2013.*

SO LONG LOLONG

The world's largest saltwater crocodile in captivity, named Lolong, died in the Philippines on 10 February, reducing many inhabitants of the southern town of Bunawan to tears because of the expected decline in tourism. The one-ton reptile, measuring 6.17m (20ft 3in), was blamed for killing a child and fisherman before it was captured in 2011 and sent to an eco-tourism park. Officials planned to have it preserved and exhibited. *[AP] <i> 11 Feb 2013.*

TROUSERS ALLOWED

A 200-year-old law forbidding women to wear trousers in Paris has been revoked. Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, France's Minister of Women's Rights, responded to repeated appeals to lift the ban, which in November 1799 applied to revolutionary rebels. The unenforced law required women to apply for permission to "dress as men". *MX News (Sydney), 4 Feb 2013.*

TWO-TONE FREAKS

NEW ENGLAND AQUARIUM

This two-tone lobster, weighing 450g (about 1lb), was caught in the Atlantic off Salem, Mass., before becoming an attraction at the New England Aquarium in Boston. Such mutations occur once in every 50 million lobsters. Split-colour lobsters are often hermaphrodites; this specimen is entirely female, making it even more of a rarity. *[AP] 1 Nov; D.Mail, 7 Nov 2012.*

Donna Wood, 51, from Dorset, found this anomalous Cripps Pink apple in a pack from Asda. Experts said the colour split could be a genetic mutation triggered by cold weather, temperature changes or insect damage *D.Mail, 8 Mar 2012*

DONNA WOOD

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MATT PATTINSON

SCIENCE

DOWSING FOR BOMBS

DAVID HAMBLING looks at the controversy over the ADE 651 – a 'bomb detector' that has no scientific basis – and argues that it might just save lives anyway...

Fringe science rarely makes the headlines, but a recent struggle between conventional science and intruders from beyond its borders has turned into a matter of life of death. When £30,000 bomb detectors turn out to be high-tech dowsing rods, it looks like someone is running a scam – and British businessman James McCormick is in court for exactly that reason. But is there more going on here than meets the eye?

McCormick is the chief executive of Advanced Tactical Security & Communications Ltd, a company which produced a range of explosives detectors including the hand-held ADE 651, thousands of which were sold to the Iraqi government. These detectors consist of an antenna attached loosely to a handgrip. The detector is fitted with a 'substance detection card' which can supposedly be tuned to detect anything – not just explosives, but banknotes, human bodies, truffles or anything else.

While the original advertising material suggested that the device worked by "nuclear quadrupole resonance (NQR) or nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR)", [1] McCormick also said that it worked with explosives in the same way that a dowsing rod found water.

"We have been dealing with doubters for 10 years," he told the *Guardian*. [2] "One of the problems we have is that the machine does look a little primitive."

Hence, one supposes, the need for scientific-sounding explanations in the sales literature. A BBC *Newsnight* investigation [3] saw the device examined by a computer laboratory to confirm the absence of electronics inside the ADE 651. The programme's findings were reported to the police, McCormick was promptly arrested for fraud, and further export of the devices was banned.

Various experts confirmed that the ADE 651 lacked a scientific basis and that the description of the device as sold is inaccurate

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: An Iraqi policeman using an ADE 651 device at a checkpoint in Baghdad in 2009

Dowsing rods may be a way of accessing unconscious knowledge

(just as with many health and beauty products with supposedly 'scientifically proven' ingredients). The real issue is not *how* it works, but *whether* it works – and here the waters get muddier.

Dowsing is a good topic for scientific investigation because it has measurable results. Just put a dowser in a field and see whether they can or cannot accurately locate water. Researchers soon discovered that the willow-wand has no powers of its own, but acts as a channel for the dowser. While the rod may *seem* to twitch of its own accord, dowsing is actually an instance of the ideomotor effect, caused by unconscious muscle movements. The same effect drives the Ouija board.

Dowsers perform badly in artificial conditions. Given 10 plastic pipes, their ability to tell which contains water is no better than chance. In the real world, though, some dowsers *can* find water. Dowsers do not work in a blank, featureless laboratory, but can read a landscape and see the contours, geological signs and vegetation that are likely to be associated with the presence of water. Inductive reasoning in the style of Sherlock Holmes may look like magic, but as works like Malcolm Gladwell's *Blink* make clear, trained experts can draw conclusions instantly – even if they are don't know how they are doing it.

The dowsing rod may be a convenient way of accessing unconscious knowledge. A 2012 study at the University of British Columbia showed that when subjects had to 'guess' answers that they knew but could not consciously recall, their success rate was no better than chance. But when they used a Ouija board to answer, their success rate was dramatically higher: the unconscious knowledge made itself known via the ideomotor effect. [4]

Dowsing has quite a history with the military. There were reports of it being used by both British and German intelligence in WWII. During the Vietnam War, Louis Matacia, an operations analyst at the Marine Corps Schools at Quantico, Virginia, trained Marines to detect booby traps by dowsing with coat hanger wires. A Major Hadracker even provided demonstrations to the media. "The Marine engineers at Camp Pendleton say they don't know why it works, but are convinced it does," according to a 1967 newspaper report at the time. [5]

Elsewhere, dowsing for bombs is commonplace. When George W Bush visited Estonia in 2006, the local bomb squad checked his route for bombs by dowsing. [6] Western journalists mocked, but considerable research into 'biophysical' detection in the former Soviet Union has given the idea respectability.

So what about the Iraqis? Interior Minister Jawad al-Bolani launched a study of the ADE 651 to see whether or not it worked. To the surprise and horror of Western commentators, he backed the device: "We conducted several tests on them, and found them successful," he told Associated Press. [7]

Al-Bolani also said a survey showed that the device had located some 16,000 IEDs (improvised explosive devices) in the field, including several hundred car bombs. Officers were pleased with it, although it did require proper training. Interestingly, he suggested that some of the ADE 651s were faulty and would be replaced – possibly a measure to boost confidence in the detector.

Some might suggest that this was a typical example of incompetence and corruption, with a government official trying to justify his original decision to buy the detectors. But if the detector allows an officer to act on unconscious cues – a nervous driver, extra weight in the boot, an odd smell or other signs of a car bomb – then the technique might be genuinely useful.

This is an area where thorough and open-minded study might yield better results than simple scepticism. Like the placebo effect, dowsing may not be paranormal but it could still be valuable. And it could get a lot cheaper than £30,000 per detector.

NOTES

1 www.webcitation.org/5mzH8dWfX

2 www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/jan/22/bomb-detectors-iraq-arrest

3 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8476381.stm

4 www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1053810012000402

5 http://newspaperarchive.com/ames-daily-tribune/1967-10-19

6 http://shootingmessengers.blogspot.co.uk/2006/12/dowsing-for-ieds.html

7 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/8477601.stm

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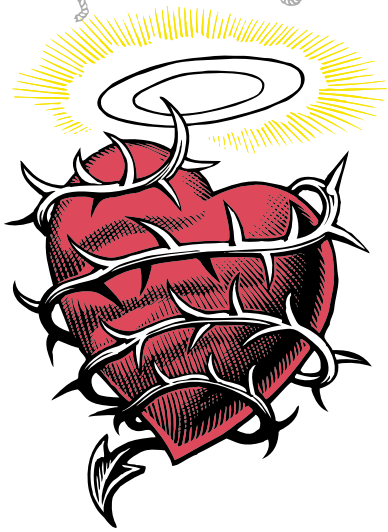

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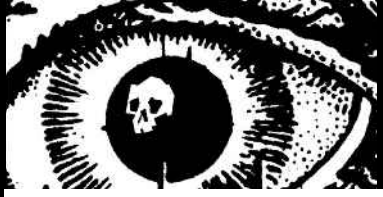


MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE looks in the mirror and sees something scary staring back at him...

ABOVE: Customers at a Chicago beauty salon fall victim to a 'haunted mirror' publicity stunt.
BELOW: The supposedly haunted mirror put up for auction on eBay earlier this year.

MIRROR, MIRROR...

Haunted mirrors – and the assorted ghosts, demons and evil entities that lurk within them – are a common theme found in horror films, including *Dead of Night* (1945), *From Beyond the Grave* (1973), *Prince of Darkness* (1987) *Candyman*, (1992) and *Mirrors* (2008), to name but a few. Supernatural beings appearing as reflections in mirrors also feature in various blood-curdling urban legends in (mostly American, and often rather adolescent) folklore. Vampires prove an exception in not casting reflections, but as Sir Christopher Frayling points out in his 1991 book *Vampyres*, such lore associated with bloodsuckers is largely synthetic, being derived from novels rather than tradition.

Playing upon mirror and looking glass lore was a rather sadistic prank perpetrated in February 2013 against customers at a Chicago beauty salon as part of a promotional campaign for a film with the oxymoronic title *The Last Exorcism 2.* Hapless customers sitting down in front of a hairdresser's mirror were shown the illusory image of a young girl. Salon staff pretended they could not see the image, leading the victims to think they were either hallucinating or that the girl was a ghost appearing within the mirror. "Customers shriek when face of a young girl appears before them" as the *Daily Mail* put it. To ramp up the hysteria further, the girl then crawled upside down into the shop, in imitation of a deleted scene from *The Exorcist* (1973) or the '*arc-de-circle*' symptom recorded in 19th century psychiatric literature.

About the best that can be said for this hoax is that it is an example of how mirrors can be used to stage optical tricks, such as the Victorian 'Pepper's Ghost' illusion created with reflections and clever lighting. The *Mail* apparently found this modern example very funny, in keeping with current voyeuristic tastes for broadcasting public humiliations. *Daily Mail, 27 Feb 2013.*

However, tales of haunted mirrors were obviously in vogue at the *Mail* since it had covered a supposedly real case of a haunted mirror just over a week earlier. Student Joseph Birch, 20, and artist Sotiris Charalambous, 34, of Muswell Hill, London, complained of frightening incidents at their flat, which they attributed to the presence of a Victorian mirror. The two men claim the mirror has brought "bad luck, misery, financial problems and illness" – and poltergeist-style manifestations. Mr Birch stated: "Things are constantly going missing, keys, phones... I went into the bathroom one morning after hearing a loud bang. I found objects strewn out across the floor, and a tub of shaving foam, which had been on the other side of the room, down the toilet". Initially, ascribing events to "some kind of voodoo or black magic," the two men now blame a malefic influence from the mirror, which even caused physical sensations when both awoke in the early hours screaming and experiencing stabbing pains. Mr Birch has also suffered scratch marks over his body, a feature (mercifully rare) reported in poltergeist cases such as the South Shields poltergeist of 2006 and the Eleanore Zugun case in 1926. The poltergeist nature of these incidents suggest the manifestations may be linked with living minds, rather than the mirror – assuming anything paranormal is occurring at all. However, according to Mr Birch they have seen "strange shadows" in the mirror and "orbs of light"; though these – as with 'orb' photographs – may have a perfectly mundane explanation. Mr Birch told the *Mail:* "I don't think the mirror likes it since I painted it silver... I think someone could have been murdered in front of the mirror and that's why it has been haunting our house... just being around this mirror gives me the creeps and makes me feel sick to my stomach... We feel drained of energy all the time, but if we leave the flat it makes us feel instantly better."

Now getting out of the house and taking healthy exercise is actually something I have recommended in alleged poltergeist cases, but curiously the two men have not taken the obvious step of simply throwing the mirror away. Instead they have opted for a modern form of exorcism – auctioning it on eBay with a reserve price of £100, which rather calls into question just how genuinely fearful they are about its presence. Understandably, a great deal of scepticism has been voiced, but some 20,000 people viewed it on line.

Despite the frequency of mirrors in supernatural fiction, accounts of psychic happenings involving mirrors are rather rare. Mirrors are sometimes moved in poltergeist cases, but rarely broken. Psychic investigator Harry Price's first visit to Borley Rectory, Essex, in 1929 featured tapping sounds heard coming from the wooden back of the mirror in the Rectory's 'Blue Room'. It was dubbed the "ticking mirror" thereafter in Borley literature, with believers attributing sounds to the spirit of rector Harry Bull who had died in 1927.

Guy Playfair, on a visit to Uri Geller's home, witnessed what he described as "an 'apport' in what I considered near-perfect conditions". This was a small shaving mirror which fell from the ceiling "in a brightly-lit room, some distance from where Geller was sitting motionless, with both hands holding a piece of paper". (Uri Geller and GL Playfair, *The Geller Effect*, 1986)

Whilst writers on apparitions have noted

ghosts *do* cast reflections (see *Apparitions*, 1942, by GNM Tyrrell), spontaneous ghosts which first become visible in mirrors are seldom reported. The poet Robert Graves in his classic autobiography *Goodbye To All That* (1929) referred to a big Tudor House called Maesyneuardd near Harlech, Wales, as "the most haunted house I have ever been in, though the ghosts, with one exception, were not visible, except occasionally in the mirrors".

Around 1918, the novelist Pamela Frankau (1908-1967) saw a ghost in a mirror set in a cupboard door at a school called Claremont at Eastbourne. In her *Pen to Paper: A Novelist's Notebook* (1961), she described it as "a humped, white shape, like a dwarf. It scuttled straight to the middle of the landing and then it wasn't there… No light-effect, no shadow, could account for it. It was a solid thing, seen first in the glass, then coming between me and the glass."

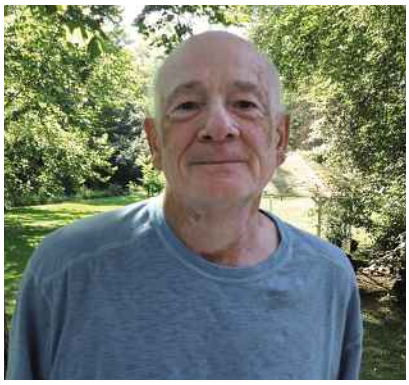
Actor Stanley Lupino (1893-1942) reported in 1923 that he had seen the ghostly face of renowned clown Dan Leno (1860-1904) in a mirror of his dressing room at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. He winked at it and the face winked back. Lupino later became a spiritualist. (*The Register*, Adelaide, 15 Dec 1923; *From the Stocks to the Stars*, 1934, by Stanley Lupino).

In her *Haunted East Anglia* (1974), Joan Forman detailed the disturbing experiences of a recently married acquaintance 'June Bennett' at a house in Wroxham, Norfolk, suggesting the post-mortem return of her husband's deceased first wife. On one occasion, whilst seated before a dressing table mirror, Mrs Bennett saw the glass mist over. Attempting to rub the glass clear, she was shocked to see another woman's face. From her husband's description the face resembled that of his late first wife; not surprisingly, "June Bennett did not use that mirror again".

The Angel Hotel, Guildford, Surrey, was the scene of an interesting sighting in 1970 where a guest saw a figure like a Polish military officer in a mirror. The image – also seen by the man's wife – remained visible long enough for him to make a sketch of it on a napkin using a biro. A copy was reproduced in Jack Hallam's *Haunted Inns of England* (1972) and in Philip Hutchinson's *Haunted Guildford* (2006). Three years later actor Sir Roger Moore reputedly saw the ghost.

At Alexandra Palace, London, in 1975, a BBC engineer named Peter Cole was looking into a mirror whilst combing his hair and saw the image of a white-haired man behind him reflected in the glass. Turning round he experienced "a terrific flash of light" as the figure vanished. It was one of a number of ghostly incidents reported at the site in the mid-1970s (*Hornsey Journal*, 1 Aug 1975).

Rare as such encounters may be, it is possible that they are simply a variant of an age-old psi-phenomenon, the appearance of visions in shiny or reflective surfaces, such as pools of water, crystal balls, polished metal surfaces or the shiny entrails of animals. Such phenomena are usually listed under the heading 'clairvoyance' and treated separately from ghosts and apparitions.



A YOUNG ARTIST SAW A HORRIBLE MONSTER AND SAID SHE COULDN'T WAIT TO PAINT IT…

However, there may well be an overlap, judging by remarkable tests begun in 1987 when scientific experiments were conducted to see if visions of deceased persons could actually be induced in mirrors. This was a project undertaken by Dr Raymond Moody – responsible for coining the term 'Near-Death experience' or NDE in 1975 – who set about re-creating a classical technique for conjuring visions of departed spirits used in ancient Greece. According to one story, Dr Moody had his idea on a visit to a second-hand bookshop. Browsing the shelves, a small book suddenly fell out in front of him. Picking it up, he found the volume was *Crystal Gazing* by Northcote Thomas, published in 1905, detailing the author's studies of visions obtained using crystals, mirrors and other reflective surfaces. Thomas found these could all be used for inducing visions in susceptible persons – even succeeding with jugs of water and ink!

Inspired by Thomas's book, Moody also examined accounts of the ancient Greek 'Oracle of the Dead' at Ephyra where a polished cauldron was maintained in a dimly lit underground chamber and in which visions of the dead appeared. Dr Moody decided he should conduct some tests of his own and re-create a modern version of the shrine at Ephyra. He chose as his base the upstairs room in an old mill house in rural Alabama. He hung up a large Victorian mirror about 4ft (1.2m) square at one end of the room and placed a comfortable chair seat facing it at the other. The mirror was positioned so the person sitting in the chair was unable to see their own reflection. Behind the chair was a small shaded low-wattage lamp, resulting in the very dim illumination of an old-style séance. He then surrounded it all with a tent with black poplin (the material used in old-fashioned plate-camera development for ensuring black-out when composing a picture).

LEFT: NDE researcher Raymond Moody experimented with inducing visions of the dead in his 'psychomanteum'.

The first volunteers to try out the 'psychomanteum' (as it came to be called) were graduate psychology students and medical practitioners, a requirement being that the volunteers were "stable, mature people and to have a curiosity about human consciousness" (whether this applies to all medics and psychology students I don't know, but apparently it did to those in Dr Moody's experiments). Participants were asked to sit in the chair and visualise a deceased friend or relative they would like to see again, encouraged to talk at length about the person they had chosen to see and to recall the happiest (and least happy) memories of them and bring photograph albums and souvenirs of the loved one. Shortly before nightfall, the volunteers would enter the psychomanteum and sit in the chair and think of their loved ones. Initially, all the seated participant would see in the mirror was an inky pool of darkness. But over a 90-minute period, visions might appear in the glass, with approximately half of Moody's participants reporting apparitional experiences, and if fortunate, a vision of their deceased loved one. Thereafter, Moody had no shortage of volunteers for further tests (it's always amazing how there exist a substantial number of the population who are clearly game for anything!) Some of these experiences went beyond just seeing a recognised friend or loved one, and involved figures actually stepping out of the mirror or reaching out and touching the viewer. Other psychical researchers have experimented with similar apparitional chambers and obtained positive responses, though not in the same large numbers as in Moody's original sample. Significantly, there do not seem to be any reports of bad experiences in such psychomantea, apart from a young artist who claimed to have seen a horrible monster and said she couldn't wait to get home to paint it!

The ultimate question is, of course, whether any of the apparitions existed outside the minds of the volunteers. A particularly interesting test would be to put pairs of observers in a psychomanteum together and discover whether any apparitional experience can be shared.

Certainly, it would appear that there is much scope for repeating these experiments simply because the basic equipment is easy to obtain and set up, though one might draw a line at the Muswell Hill mirror should it become available…

Source**:** *Reunions: Visionary encounters with departed loved ones* (1993) by Raymond Moody.

SNACK SURPRISES

What's on the FT menu this issue? Rotting bird, live lizard salad, tree frog with asparagus and light bulb kebab... yum!

● The winner of a cockroach-eating competition died shortly after swallowing dozens of the live insects as well as worms. Edward Archbold, 32, became ill and collapsed at the Ben Siegel Reptile Store, where the contest – "to eat the most bugs in four minutes without vomiting" – took place in Deerfield Beach, Florida, on 5 October. He was later pronounced dead at hospital. About 30 others competed in the event, hoping to win a female ivory ball python. Officials were waiting for the results of an autopsy to determine cause of death, as roaches are not known to be unsafe to eat and none of the other contestants became ill afterwards. *The Huffington Post, Miami Herald, 8 Oct; BBC News, 9 Oct; Sun, 10 Oct 2012.*

● James and Jasmine Watson of Yate, Gloucestershire, were having a candlelit dinner when Mr Watson made an unpleasant discovery. After taking three mouthfuls of a £1.50 "washed and ready to eat" baby leaf and rocket salad from Tesco, he noticed what looked like a "soggy fishcake". Then he saw a beak and realised it was the rotting corpse of a bird. Tesco offered the couple £200-worth of gift vouchers in compensation. Mr Watson, 32, a sales director, said the offer was insulting and he had no intention of shopping at Tesco again. "I would really like someone to explain to me how a creature so large got into a bag of salad," he said.

The 5in (13cm) bird was a blackcap European warbler, native to Spain and Italy. In recent years, substantial numbers have taken to wintering in British gardens. Tesco said it had investigated the matter, adding: "Both we and our suppliers have robust measures in place to prevent incidents such as this." Not robust enough, evidently. In November 2011, another dead bird (species unspecified) was found in another packet of baby leaf and rocket salad from a Tesco branch in Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset; and two months earlier a live frog was found in a bag of mixed seasonal baby leaf salad from Tesco in Wimbledon, south-west London [**FT285:20**]. *Metro, D.Mail, Sun, D.Telegraph, 22 Feb 2013.*

CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

● Ann and Jim MacFarlane found a tree frog nestling in a packet of Peruvian asparagus tips they had bought in a Portsmouth supermarket. *Western Daily Press, 19 May 2012.*

● A wild rocket salad from Italy, bought from Morrisons in Killamarsh, Derbyshire, in November 2012, contained a live lizard. The store offered a refund. *D.Mail, 13 Nov 2012.*

● Linda Hebditch, 53, from Poole in Dorset was somewhat startled when a giant praying mantis leapt at her from an 80p packet of sage and onion mix from Israel, bought from Tesco, which she was planning to use for the Christmas stuffing. She took the exotic 3in (7.6cm) insect to a pet shop and was told it was a male marble peacock mantis, and was worth £25. *D.Mirror, Sun, 15 Dec 2012.*

KNS NEWS

ABOVE: This live lizard somehow made its way into a bag of Italian rocket salad bought at a branch of Morrisons in Derbyshire.

A–Z ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the crypto-zoological garden

● A pack of "finest pork and chive sausages" from a Tesco store in Sheerness, Kent, had a human tooth with a filling stuck to the side of one sausage inside its shrink-wrapping. The store offered Tony Hinds, 27, of Queenborough a mere £15 voucher in compensation, eventually sending an additional £10 voucher with a note saying: "We are confident the tooth was not inside the product when it arrived at the store." They thus imply either that Mr Hinds had made the whole thing up, or that some dextrous felon had unwrapped the sausages, attached an old tooth, and re-shrink-wrapped the product before replacing it in the display cabinet, all without anyone noticing. Never mind about horsemeat – what fiendish malevolence is loose in Kent? Another tooth full of fillings was found in a tub of Tesco's fudge-flavoured yogurt in 2011. *D.Mail, 7 Feb 2013.*

● Edna Cresswell, 77, of Acton in Suffolk, found a 1.5in (3.3cm) nail in a tin of 'Everyday Value' beans from Tesco in Sudbury. She nearly broke a tooth biting into the metal. She got a 40p refund. *Sunday People, 3 Mar 2013.*

● A customer alerted his local council after finding glass shards in his chicken kebab from Divan Turkish restaurant and takeaway in Enfield, north London, in November 2011. Environmental health officers discovered a light bulb had exploded and ended up in lamb and chicken dishes. Boss Abdurahim Teymuroglu, 35, admitted that the bulb had shattered when he was changing it and fragments had fallen into open dishes in a hot display cabinet below. He threw away the lamb dish but kept the chicken, which his staff then served to the public. Magistrates fined him £2,000 with £450 in court costs. *Sun, 24 Feb 2013.*

For more snack surprises, see **FT141:10, 188:11, 191:10, 251:9, 285:20**.

RAINBOW OWL IS A HOOT!

Recently, several correspondents alerted me to a report and photograph circulating online about a supposedly remarkable species of owl, known as the rainbow owl for its gaudy, multicoloured plumage. It is said to be native to the USA and China (an oddly discontinuous zoogeographical distribution!), but hunted into near-extinction in the early 20th century for its beautiful feathers. Moreover, it has an unusually melodious call, and is so attracted to music and singing that researchers seeking it in the field know that they will greatly increase their chances of success if they carry a portable stereo. The author of this intriguing report is one Dr Claudia Weatherfield of the University of Toldeo. As someone with a longstanding ornithological interest who had never heard of any such species, I was instantly suspicious, and some online investigations fully justified my concern. There is no University of Toldeo, nor any Claudia Weatherfield working even at the similarly named University of Toledo. The photo was clearly computer-modified, and sure enough the original image proved to be of a barred owl *Strix varia* – a common North American species without rainbow plumage. On websites devoted to exposing hoaxes, I found confirmation of my own findings plus some additional details. At least it was apt for an *FT* on sale in April! *www.snopes.com/photos/animals/rainbowowl.asp and http://urbanlegends.about.com/od/animalkingdom/ss/Rainbow-Owl.htm.*

SOME VERY BATTY CROSSBREEDING

Although the creation of a new species by hybridisation between two existing species is common among plants, it is a much rarer among animals. However, a lately revealed animal example propels this to an even more advanced level of rarity by featuring a species that has resulted from the crossbreeding of three existing species – one of which, moreover, is apparently cryptozoological. Schwartz's fruit bat *Artibeus schwartzi* is native to St Vincent and several other Lesser Antilles islands in the Caribbean, and by sequencing the DNA from 237 specimens belonging to seven different species of tropical American fruit bat, in 2010 Dr Peter Larsen of Texas Tech University revealed that the principal genome (gene complement) of Schwartz's fruit bat is a cross between those of the Jamaican fruit bat *A. jamaicensis* and the flat-faced fruit bat *A. planirostris*.

Even more remarkable, when Larsen examined the genes present within the mitochondria (tiny cell organelles) of Schwartz's fruit bat, which are separate from those in its cells' nuclei, he discovered that its mitochondrial genes didn't match those of *A. jamaicensis*, *A. planirostris*, or any other known species. In short, these particular genes must have originated from either an extinct or an undiscovered species. Almost three years have passed since these revelations, but Schwartz's fruit bat's mystery third progenitor species remains unidentified; so any cryptozoologist with an interest in bats might well achieve success by conducting some research in the Lesser Antilles. *https://blogs.discovermagazine.com/notrocketscience/2010/06/01/holy-hybrids-batman-caribbean-fruit-bat-is-a-mash-up-of-three-species/ accessed 16 Mar 2013.*

NEW YETI RESORT IN SIBERIA

A new park devoted to the yeti, and encouraging visitors to search for it, is to be built in the Sheregesh ski resort in the Shora Mountain area of Keremovo in southern Siberia, Russia (see **FT298:2, 31-35**). The park will include a hotel and museum, and a reward of a million roubles (£20,500) is being offered by the region's governor, Aman Tuleyev, to any visitor to the park who can capture a yeti and thereby confirm this longstanding crypto-primate's existence. The complex will also be used to host future conferences and lectures about the yeti. *dailymail.co.uk, 19 Jan 2013.*

BEASTLY BENEVOLENCE

The altruistic animals who look out for their owners – and sometimes each other

WALES NEWS SERVICE

ABOVE: Terfel, a blind eight-year-old dog, is enjoying an active life again thanks to his 'guide-cat' Pwditat, and the two are inseperable.

● When apprentice bricklayer Ben Rees, 17, was home alone in Llanelli, Carmarthenshire, he lit an incense stick in his bedroom before going for a shower. Embers from the joss-stick set fire to his bed and within minutes the bedroom was engulfed in flames. Cookie, his pet cockatiel whose perch is in Ben's bedroom, was alarmed by the smoke and started flapping wildly, making a lot of noise. Then he flew into the bathroom and repeatedly dive-bombed Ben who realised something was seriously wrong. He escaped through thick smoke and called the fire brigade, but Cookie could not be saved. He was buried in the garden.

"He was Ben's guardian angel," said Ben's mother, Vicky Rees, 48. "He's a hero and he died a hero. He sensed danger and seemed to know that Ben hadn't realised his bedroom was on fire. If he hadn't squawked and flapped like that I'm sure Ben would have died in there too. Thank goodness Cookie went to look for Ben – a few moments longer and he would have been trapped in the bathroom. It is so sad that Cookie didn't make it out alive. We will never forget what he did." Ben, who is studying bricklaying and plastering, was given oxygen at the scene and treated for shock by paramedics. *BBC News, 8 Feb 2013.*

● Barbara Smith-Schafer, 62, from Skegness, Lincolnshire, was diagnosed with obstructive sleep apnoea in 2009. The illness causes the airway to collapse during sleep, obstructing breathing, putting a strain on the heart that can lead to serious health conditions, including stroke and dementia. Dominic, an African grey parrot – one of seven birds kept by her husband Bernhard – has learned to imitate her snoring and whenever he notices a pause in her breathing he frantically flaps his wings and gnaws at her shoulder to wake her up.

"At first I was quite annoyed at Dominic, embarrassed that he would mimic my snoring," said Mrs Smith-Schafer. "But since my OSA began to get worse, and he's learnt to wake me up when I fall asleep in a dangerous position, or when I've stopped breathing, he's really become my knight in shining armour." *D.Telegraph, 13 Dec 2012.*

A teenager with a dangerous heart condition frequently has her life saved by her cat. Maria Gillon, 13, suffers ventricular tachycardia attacks that are so painful she can't move or speak. When it happens, her pet black cat Perla runs to alert Maria's mother Adele by biting her toes. Adele, 32, of Gorebridge, Midlothian, said: "Perla then stays with Maria until the ambulance arrives. She and Maria are inseparable and Perla even sleeps in her bed. We're lucky to have her." *D.Mirror, 29 Nov 2012.*

● A cat clawed at its owner's face after she slept through two smoke alarms. Firefighters said the tabby could have fled the kitchen blaze, but instead it stayed to save its 72-year-old owner. It was later found hiding under the bed at the house in Brixington, Devon. "The cat deserves a medal," said fire boss Nigel Snowshall. D.*Mirror, 22 Jan 2013.*

● In the early hours of 7 February, Maxine Cox, 68, fled a fire at her thatched cottage after being woken by her cat. More than 80 firefighters were needed to tackle the fire in Horns Cross, Devon. *Sun, 8 Feb 2013.*

● A blind dog can enjoy the great outdoors again thanks to a 'guide cat'. Eight-year-old Terfel kept bumping into things and spent most of his time stuck in his basket after being diagnosed with cataracts. "I took Terfel home after a man came to the charity shop I was working in and said his landlady wouldn't take dogs. More recently he became blind," said Judy Godfrey-Brown (87 or 57), a retired civil servant of Rhydwen, Holyhead, North Wales. "One night a tomcat arrived here," she said. "He just stood there outside my front door and looked at me as if to say, 'I want to be a house cat'". Pwditat, as she called him, walked straight up to Terfel and led him out of his basket and into the garden. He has been helping Terfel find his way around ever since. "I've never seen anything like it," said Ms Godfrey-Brown. "Pwditat immediately seemed to know that Terfel is blind. He used his paws to help guide him. They were glued to each other and even slept together." Because she can't look after them now, both animals have been transferred to the care of Anne Cragg at her Llangaffo cattery. *Daily Post (Wales), 3 Dec; Sun, 28 Dec 2012.*

● It seemed the days of pulling sledges with other Alaskan huskies were all over for Gonzo when he started going blind; but he is back on the trail in New Hampshire with a little help from his brother Poncho. Gonzo, one of 120 dogs at Muddy Paw Sled Dog Kennel, has resumed his place pulling a sledge to the delight of tourists. He leans into Poncho to sense where the turns are. *Irish Independent, 26 Jan 2013.*

● Kiki, a 13-year-old Siberian husky, was muzzled by his owners and left along with two cats and two other dogs in a van abandoned in a London, Ontario, parking lot. Despite having his

ability to bark suppressed by the muzzle, he remained determined to find a way to call for help: he honked the vehicle's horn repeatedly for up to a week until finally, on 10 December 2012, a passer-by noticed and called the police. London Humane Society Executive Director Judy Foster is certain the five animals would not have survived for much longer if it weren't for Kiki's efforts. "We've received numerous calls from people asking us to find a hero award for this dog," she said. The pet owners, Donna Hebert and Allan Folkins-Wyre, were charged with five counts of cruelty to animals. If convicted, they face possible fines of up to $10,000 or as much as 18 months in prison. *Shropshire Star, 15 Dec 2012; animalrescuesite.com, 20 Jan 2013.*

● Three-year-old Julia wandered into the forest near her home in Pierzwin, Poland, on 1 March. More than 200 people searched for her; she was found in marshes several miles away the following morning. A black mongrel called Czarue had stayed by her side during the night when temperatures fell to 5°C (23°F). She was taken to hospital with frostbite. Firefighter Grzegorz Szymanski said the dog kept the little girl warm enough to survive. "For the whole night the animal was with the girl, it never left her," he said. "It was five degrees below zero and the child was wet." *Independent, D.Mirror, 4 Mar 2013.*

● A girl whose mother dumped her in a barn while she went clubbing was saved from freezing to death by a cat. Two-year-old Daniela was found curled up with the pet in bitter cold after Elana Azarov, 25, left her at a neighbouring farm in Grabovka, Russia. The farmer found her after hearing her crying. *Metro, 11 Feb 2013.*

ABOVE: Barbara Smith-Schafer with Dominic, the African grey who keeps an eye on her.

KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF LOBSTER, REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER ON...
~~THE RETURN OF RITUAL SATANIC ABUSE~~

I have been revising my little book on the Kennedy assassination, *Who Shot JFK?,* for the 50th anniversary of the shooting later this year. I still conclude that JFK was killed by a Texas-based conspiracy which had decided that the only way to keep vice president Lyndon Baines Johnson's political career on the road was to make him president. No, the evidence isn't conclusive – but there is much more of it supporting this thesis than there is supporting any of the others.

Two fascinating snippets have turned up recently, one new, one I had overlooked. At the centre of this was a Texas businessman called Billie Sol Estes who was running an agricultural subsidies scam – worth maybe $500 million a year in today's money – and paying off politicians, including Johnson, to get it. But Estes's fraud got exposed – he was on the cover of *Time* magazine in May 1962 under the strapline 'The Billie Sol Estes scandal' – and inquiries began in Washington. The bodies of Estes's business associates started turning up in their cars as they 'committed suicide'. A Department of Agriculture official, Henry Marshall, sent to investigate Estes, also 'committed suicide' by shooting himself 5 times with a bolt-action rifle. The Texas criminal justice system was clearly under the control of the Johnson network.

The Estes scandal was good news for the Kennedy brothers, who wanted Johnson off the ticket for the 1964 presidential election. Johnson and Robert Kennedy detested each other and LBJ had ended up as vice president by mistake: the Kennedys offered him the position as a courtesy, sure that he would refuse it. When he accepted it they were stuck.[1] Robert Kennedy, Attorney General, dispatched a large task force from the Justice Department to Texas to dig the dirt on Estes and Johnson.[2]

In 1963, James Wagenvoord was the assistant to *Life* Magazine's Executive Editor. He has recently described how *Life* was getting information from Robert Kennedy and the Justice Department and was preparing a big spread on Johnson's wealth, a subject which had never been publicly aired. For after a career as a poorly paid public official of one kind of another, Johnson was a wealthy man with large land holdings in Texas, as well as owning a radio and TV station. *Life* was getting official information on another of the big corruption scandals involving LBJ's protégé Bobby Baker who was being investigated by a Senate committee. Wagenvoord wrote recently: "On publication Johnson would have been finished and off the '64 ticket (reason the material was fed to us) and would probably have been facing prison time." [3]

That issue of *Life* was due to be in the shops on 26 or 27 November 1963 – but it never appeared. Instead, the LBJ-corruption story from the Kennedy camp was replaced by *Life's* coverage of the assassination.

JFK wasn't killed because of Vietnam, by the Mob, the military, or the anti-Castro Cubans, but by *politics*. Going after LBJ, using federal agents and leaks from the Justice Department to discredit him and get him off the ticket for the 1964 election, the Kennedy brothers backed LBJ and his gang into a corner. And they underestimated them. That group had been literally getting away with murder in Texas since the early 1950s. Now JFK was added to their list, and they got away with it again.

1 The best account of this is in Robert Caro's 2012 *'The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Passage of Power'*, chapter 4.

2 www.chron.com/CDA/archives/archive.mpl/ 1996_ 1349692/ billie-sol-estes-last-one-standing-thirty-three-ye.html

3 See the e-mail from Wagenvoord at www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ JFKwagenvoord.htm

MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

Our archæological round-up is brought to you by **PAUL SIEVEKING**, who digs up news of a European town that predates ancient Greece by a millennium and the lost amphitheatre of northern England – now found.

EUROPE'S OLDEST TOWN

A prehistoric town unearthed in north-eastern Bulgaria over the last seven years is allegedly the oldest European urban settlement found to date. The site is near the town of Provadia, about 25 miles (40km) from the Black Sea coast. Vasil Nikolov, a professor from Bulgaria's National Institute of Archæology, said the stone walls excavated by his team are estimated to date between 4700 and 4200 BC – more than a millennium before the start of Greece's ancient civilisation. They have unearthed remains of a settlement of two-storey houses encircled by a fortified wall, 10ft (3m) high and 4.5ft (1.4m) thick, with a diameter of about 300ft (90m), along with parts of a gate and a series of pits used for rituals. Excavation of graves showed that some of the bodies had been sliced in half and buried from the pelvis up, a practice that has mystified the archæologists.

The settlement was home to about 350 people who produced salt from the nearby rock-salt deposits. They had probably grown rich from the trade, judging from the size of the houses as well as the copper needles and pottery found in graves at the site. "They boiled brine from salt springs in kilns and baked it into bricks, which were then exchanged for other commodities with neighbouring tribes," said Nikolov, citing as possible evidence the gold and copper jewellery and artefacts unearthed in the region. The most valuable is a collection of 3,000 gold pieces unearthed 40 years ago at a necropolis near Varna, believed to be the oldest gold treasure in the world. "For millennia, salt was one of the most valued commodities, on a par with gold," said Nikolov, adding that this explained the massive stone walls, meant to keep the salt safe. Further excavations are uncertain because of inadequate funding. Last year, the dig was underwritten by the Gipson Foundation based in New York. *dailymail.co.uk, 29 Oct; [AP] 1 Nov 2012.*

LOST ARENA

The lost amphitheatre of northern England has been located on a Yorkshire hilltop, ending centuries of speculation. The find was made by Cambridge University archæologists under the direction of Rose Ferraby, who grew up locally and was told the amphitheatre legend by her grandfather. A printout from geomagnetic scanners revealed a great tiered bank of seats below curving hummocks in a field on Studforth Hill near the village of Aldborough. The oval area would have combined spectacles and entertainments with a magnificent 360-degree view, making it the equivalent of a national theatre of the north. Most of the tiered seats were quarried or hacked out centuries ago, but the high bank that forms the crown of Studforth Hill hides the surviving section.

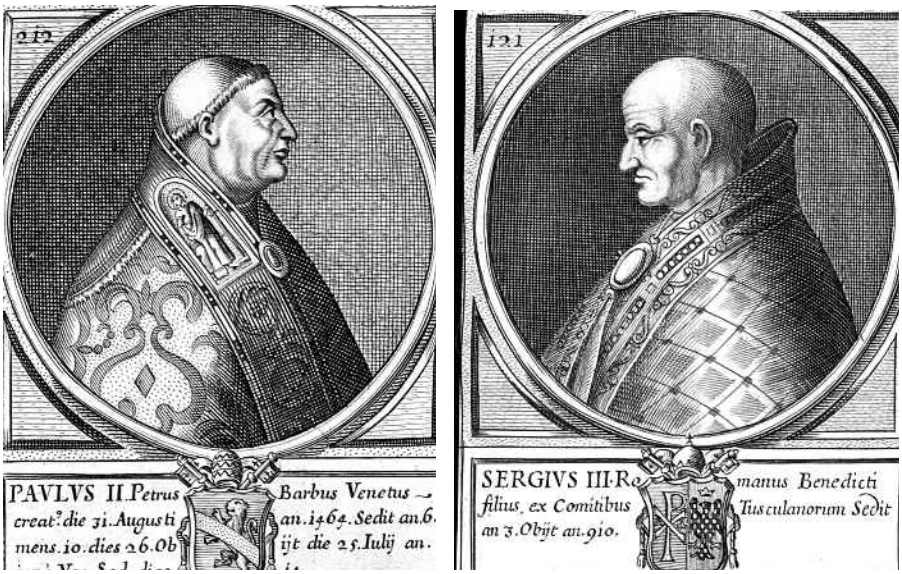
"We don't yet know whether the seats are stone, which would have been the best quality, or a mixture of timber and compacted earth which has been found at other sites in the UK," said Martin Millett, professor of classical archæology at Cambridge. "But there are at least four rows and an extra ridge of land behind the trees suggesting that there may have been a fifth. Whatever the material, it would have been an imposing building."

Initial work suggests the amphitheatre was flanked by a sports stadium. "Its discovery leaves little doubt that Isurium Brigantium, as Aldborough was called in Roman times, was the civil capital of the Britons known as Brigantes, effectively the population between Derbyshire and Hadrian's Wall," said Prof Millett. "York is much better-known for Roman remains, in part because it has remained a great city, but the evidence suggests that it was the military base. Civil power and society, and the most important place for Roman Britons in the northern province, was likely to have been here." *Guardian, 18 Aug 2011.*

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

163. HOLY FATHERS, BATMAN!


212
PAVLVS II Petrus Barbus Venetus
creat. die 31. Augusti an. 1464. Sedit an. 6.
mens. 10. dies 26. Ob ijt die 25. Iulij an.
121
SERGIVS III Romanus Benedicti
filius, ex Comitibus Tusculanorum Sedit
an 3. Obijt an. 910.

BOTH PICTURES: HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Paul II (1464-71) died from a heart attack while being sodomised; Sergius III (904-11) preferred teenage girls.

I expect many are already asking if Francis, new occupant of the Popemobile, will live up to predecessors Benedict XVI or John Paul II (we still await the election of George Ringo I). Others may compare him to that old American TV pontificator, Francis the Talking Mule.

But, looking back at some of the not-so-holy fathers, it's more a question of living down to.

Sacerdotal sexual abuse and sadistic Magdalene Houses should cause no surprise. Benedict XVI may not have satisfied their victims with his polyglot apologies, but was personally several cuts above the homonymous Benedict IX. This triple-term pope (1032-44, 1045, 1047-8), a boy wonder elected at age 12, was bisexual and bestialist, murderer, and Satanist, (in)famous for hosting orgies catering to all tastes. After surviving an attempt to strangle him during Mass at the altar, he went on to marry his cousin and sell the papacy to godfather Gregory VI. Condemned in contemporary Peter Damian's *Liber Gomorrhianus* (1051), also by Dante, as "a demon from hell in the guise of a priest," he is now differently immortalised in Lynne Fletcher's *The First Gay Pope* (1992).

First, but not last, homoeroticism being given a boost by Pope Urban's (1095) callagium, a tax on the clergy's mistresses going into his own pocket. Both Julius II (Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel commissioner) and Julius III (1550-55) were avid pederasts, the latter's catamites including one of his own illegitimate sons, this perhaps earning him Cardinal della Casa's dedication of his poem *In Praise of Sodomy* (arse gratia artis?).

> Gregory VI was condemned by Dante as "a demon from hell in the guise of a priest"

Paul II (1464-71) had a variant penchant for watching naked men being tortured, his own death caused by a heart attack while being sodomised – clearly a fundamentalist.

Very different was the homophobic Innocent III (1198-1216) who interrogated suspected sodomites by lowering them naked onto red-hot spikes – shades of Edward II's murder by lethal red-hot poker.

Another not so innocent Innocent was the Third one (1484-92) with his eight illegitimate sons and matching set of daughters. He had the grace to acknowledge them, at the cost of hearing his reign dubbed 'The Golden Age of Bastards'.

Papal heterosexuality was alive and well. I think of that snigger-inducing hymn we used to sing at School Assembly: "May their seed time past be yielding/ Year by year a richer store." Sergius III (904-11) was a proto-Jimmy Savile, besotted with underage girls. When 45, he sired from his 15-year-old mistress a son who would become John XI.

Anacletus (1130-8) had incestuous relationships with his sister and other female relatives. When not thus engaged, his other sport was raping nuns.

Other sister-shaggers (many a true word is spoken incest) included Sixtus IV (1471-84), the result being an illegitimate son to join five others elsewhere sired. Paul III (1534-49) preferred dallying with his daughter and, when not poisoning suspect relatives and recalcitrant clergy, enjoyed counting the tithes levied by him on Rome's 45,000 prostitutes.

Clement VI (1343-52) divided his time between innumerable mistresses and tarts, earning Petrarch's description "an ecclesiastic Dionysus with his obscene and infamous artifices."

For a mixed bag of other tastes, we may instance Clement VII (1378-94) famous for his deftness in decapitating men with pikes; Leo I (440-61) who held show-trials of clergy accused of mixing semen with the sacrament; Benedict XII (1334-42) whose boozing inspired the expression 'Drunk as a Pope'.

Tertullian (*Apology*, ch50) famously proclaimed: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church". These papal pranks with their often-sanguinary consequences pretty well reverse his maxim.

John XXIII's (definitely not be confused with his modern homonym) trial in 1416 inspired this Edward Gibbon gem: "The most scandalous charges were suppressed: the Vicar of Christ was only accused of piracy, murder, rape, sodomy, and incest."

Gibbon's mot reminds me of *Beyond the Fringe*'s caricature of the theatre-censoring Lord Chamberlain: "I don't want to see rape, lust, incest, sodomy on the stage. I can get all that at home."

Prize exhibit must be Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503), memorably played in the 1981 BBC *Borgias* series by Adolfo Celi, previously and suitably the villain in the Bond *Thunderball*. His licentiousness was even rebuked by Pius II (1458-64), a bit rich from someone who had a stable of mistresses, one of whom bore him four bastards, accompanied by three others of uncertain parentage. Best (or worst) remembered for his 1501 'Joust of the Whores', a massive striptease followed by a fucking contest for the male guests, Alexander was said by Gibbon to have presided over more orgies than Masses.

Dead at 72, Alexander's corpse was thus described by contemporary Raphael Volterrano: "Revolting to behold. Deformed and blackened, prodigiously swelled, exhaling infectious odours, the lips and nose covered with brown spittle, a gaping mouth with its poison-blackened [accidentally bumped off by son Cesare, some thought] tongue lolling over his chin." This X-rated spectacle was confirmed by the Venetian ambassador: " The most monstrously ugly and horrible dead body ever seen, totally without human shape."

Habemus Papam! – Yes, but (to twist the hopeful proverb) Popes spring eternal in the human beast...

(For more, see John Julius Norwich's *The Popes: A History*, 2011. Also, judging from online extracts, plenty of papal pandemonium in ER Chamberlin's *The Bad Popes*, 1969, and Nigel Cawthorne's *Sex Lives of the Popes*, 1999).

OUT OF THE ASHES

DAVID V BARRETT contemplates everyday life and sudden death in Pompeii at a new British Museum exhibition

SOPRINTENDENZA SPECIALE PER I BENI ARCHEOLOGICI DI NAPOLI E POMPEI / TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

LEFT: The streets of Pompeii today. **BELOW:** Pan has his way with a she-goat. **BOTTOM:** A portrait of a baker and his wife.

"In a future generation, when crops spring up again, when this wasteland regains its green, will men believe that cities and peoples lie beneath? That in days of old their lands lay closer to the sea? Nor has that fatal summit ceased to threaten." – Statius, *Silvæ*, c. AD 90

Nearly 2,000 years ago near Naples, a volcano erupted. Two towns were buried in ash and pumice. Centuries later they were dug up, and body-shaped hollows were found.

But the dead are only really interesting when we've known them alive. And that's what the exhibition at the British Museum excels in: bringing the people of Pompeii and Herculaneum to life.

It begins with a video reconstruction of the House of the Tragic Poet, a fairly opulent house which was first excavated in the early 19th century and which inspired Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 1834 novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*. The video leads us through each room in turn and the exhibition is largely organised around these rooms.

But first there's a street scene outside the house, with a soundtrack of bustle and clatter. There are a couple of terracotta bottles containing garum, the ubiquitous Roman fish sauce, made from fermented mackerel (including the heads, tails and intestines); one of them has an inscription showing that it's kosher, for the Jewish community.

DAVID V BARRETT

There's a beautifully illustrated sign for a tavern, the Phœnix, just like a pub sign today; next to it is a photo of the partially excavated site, with the sign *in situ*. On the sign is the message: "*Phœnix felix et tu*" – "The Phœnix is lucky, may you be too". Taverns were where the poorer people congregated, where they bought pies and pastries and stew, and drank wine and gambled and brawled and found sex.

Sex. The Romans didn't shy away from it. The phallus was a symbol of good fortune; there's a bronze wind chime with a hanging lamp, suspended from a man with an enormous phallus. Another wind chime is a winged phallus with its own phallus, and a phallus-shaped tail. There's even a very basic terracotta cock-and-balls from above a baker's oven, with the scratched words "*Hic habitat felicitas*" – "Good fortune lives here".

Pan's half-goat anyway, so it's not really bestiality...

SOPRINTENDENZA SPECIALE PER I BENI ARCHEOLOGICI DI NAPOLI E POMPEI / TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

There's a tasteful fresco of a couple making love (with a slave standing in the background, presumably ready to render any assistance required), but there's one exhibit in a side room, with a parental advisory notice by the doorway: Pan making love to a goat. She's lying back, apparently enjoying it, and both have tender looks on their faces. Pan's half-goat anyway, so it's not really bestiality...

The Romans had what might be seen as a healthy everyday relationship with their gods. There are portable altars, and shrines to household gods, including one in the kitchen. Statues and paintings abound, and not all of them (to a Judæo-Christian mind) are respectful. Bacchus, fair enough, is linked with drink and sex; but there's a wonderful statue of a naked Hercules, clearly three sheets to the wind, about to piss.

The sculptures and paintings of people from Pompeii and Herculaneum aren't stylised ideals; they're real individuals. In the atrium, the reception area of a house, is a herm, the bronze head of one Lucius Cæcilius Iucundus, complete with a large wart on his cheek, sitting atop a marble pillar. There's a lovely portrait of a baker and his wife, clearly equals in their business; they could be people we meet in the pub today – in fact, the baker bears a startling resemblance to the café-running boyfriend in BBC's *Miranda*.

BOTH PHOTOS: DAVID V BARRETT

ABOVE: A child of Pompeii at the moment of death. **BOTTOM**: A detail of the beautiful garden room fresco.

Curator Paul Roberts stresses that the objects in the exhibition are people's very personal possessions. There are a couple of serviceable-looking potties in the bedroom, one ceramic, with ledges to support the bottom, the other bronze, with a lid to cover its contents. There's a lovely silver mirror, and a cosmetics box, and a pair of tweezers. There's a linen chest for clothes, and a baby's cot on rockers; both are carbonised wood. In the kitchen there are pots and pans; there are also bowls of carbonised figs, pomegranates, peas and chickpeas.

A decent Roman house would have a garden at its centre, but it might also have a garden room, its walls painted like a wild garden, with plants and birds. With three almost complete walls, charmingly painted, this is perhaps the most peaceful and beautiful room in the exhibition; birds twitter on the soundtrack.

But we turn a corner, and we're suddenly confronted with the reason we know about Pompeii and Herculaneum. In AD79, the people whose lives we've been observing died. They had some warning, grabbing a few treasured belongings as they fled: a bag of money, their jewellery, their tools, a lamp, the key to their home, these personal possessions to be found, centuries later, with the dead – over 1,500 of them, so far, in the two towns.

In Herculaneum, many tried to escape by sea, and perished on the beach; some 300 skeletons were found in the 1980s. There's a photograph of a skeleton dubbed 'the Soldier', lying face-down with his sword by his side. The sword is on display, given a stark reality by the photograph.

It is sobering to see a resin cast of a woman – and in front of it, in perfect condition, the gold jewellery she was wearing when she died.

The other bodies are plaster-of-Paris. There aren't many of them here. There don't need to be. One family group shows a father, a mother holding a child, and another child, with face and clothing in clear detail, lying on the floor. They were found in, and probably owned, the house with the garden room.

That's what makes this exhibition so outstanding. These were real people, whose lives we see – their day-to-day possessions, their furniture, the painted walls of their homes – before we see the moment of their horrific deaths.

Life and Death: Pompeii and Herculaneum, British Museum, Until 29 September

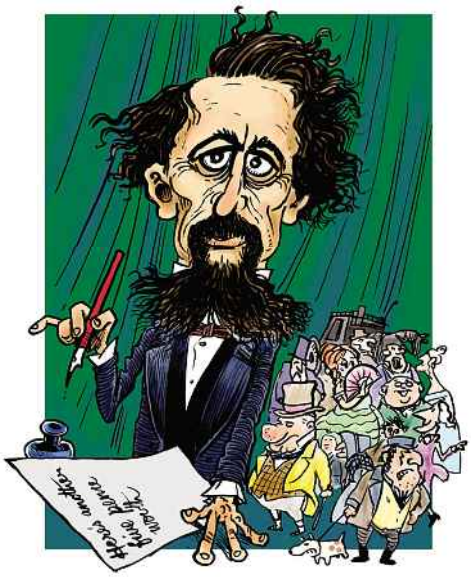
Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

164. DICKENS, THE PENNY-A-WORD

The myth

Charles Dickens was paid by the word (or the line) for his novels, which explains why he was so prone to prolixity.



HUNT EMERSON

The "truth"

This legend seems to have taken root quite early on, perhaps even by the end of the 19th century. But Dickens was never paid per word, or per line. For the most part, he was paid per instalment; he would be contracted to provide a complete novel in serial form, typically with each monthly "number" being 32 pages long. The advantages of this system are clear; the author and publisher are able to start earning from a property much earlier than if they had to wait for full-length publication, and so each instalment helps to finance the next, while a serialised book is available to many readers who could never afford to buy it as a single volume. As any writer who has written "to length" will tell you, the form is as likely to involve an author in cutting back as it is padding out; he gains nothing overall from simply spinning the piece out with irrelevant verbosity. Apart from anything, serial publication risks losing readers at every stage – each episode must make the reader want to buy the next. Dickens's novels are long because they are long – that was just his style, as indeed it was the style of so many of his contemporaries.

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Disclaimer

Should any of the individually handcrafted words in this episode of Mythconceptions prove incorrect, please report them to the editor, who will then excise them from my invoice.

Mythchaser

Norman Wisdom's popularity in Albania is well-known; but is it true, as invariably claimed in the Western media, that all films from capitalist countries were banned under Albanian leader Enver Hoxha, with the sole exception of the "Mr Pitkin" comedies?

FOR MORE MYTHCONCEPTIONS, GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/mythbusters

NECROLOG

This month, we wave goodbye to the "paranormal plumber" who was also an astrophysicist, magician and SPR president, and to a writer and alternative historian

PATRICIA ROBERTSON

ARCHIE ROY

Archie Roy made significant contributions to both astronomy and psychical research. The son of a draughtsman at the Glasgow shipyards, he was educated at Hillhead High School and Glasgow University, obtaining his PhD in 1954. After initially teaching school science, he joined the university's department of physics and astronomy in 1958 as a lecturer, rising to professor in 1977. He retired in 1989.

Professionally, he was a distinguished astronomer, an expert on astrodynamics and the world authority on the mechanics of orbits, with an interest in archæoastronomy. In the 1960s he worked as a consultant to NASA, helping to calculate trajectories for the Lunar Orbital Program. He was a member of the International Astronomical Union, which in 1986 named an asteroid after him, 5806 Archie-roy. He was a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, the British Interplanetary Society, and the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

Roy's interest in psychical research began in the 1950s when he was wandering round the old Glasgow University library and came across shelves devoted to psychical research and Spiritualism. At first dismissive, he glanced at some of the volumes and saw names he recognised, such as William James, Sir William Crookes and Sir Oliver Lodge. His curiosity got the better of him and he was hooked.

He joined the Society for Psychical Research in 1973, becoming a frequent contributor to its publications and conferences. He was president 1992–1995, and afterwards was elected a vice-president. In 2004 he was awarded the SPR's rarely bestowed *Myers Memorial Medal* in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the field. In 1987 he founded and was the first president of the Scottish Society for Psychical Research, remaining its honorary president.

Roy's interests included consciousness research and the entire range of psychical phenomena, but particularly life after death. While cautious in assessing the evidence, he felt that survival of bodily death was the most parsimonious explanation for it. He was a valuable member of the SPR's Survival Research Committee, and sat with a number of mediums, including a visit to Scole in Norfolk to examine the remarkable phenomena being reported by Robin and Sandra Foy's circle [see **FT130:6, 132:22–24, 261:64–65, 300:19**]. While there, he had a complex discussion with an apparent discarnate entity about astronomy at a level he thought would have been beyond all but a handful of specialists in the country.

A major initiative in which he was involved was PRISM (Psychical Research Involving Selected Mediums), a rare collaboration between Spiritualists and psychical researchers. With his long-term collaborator Tricia Robertson he conducted a five-year study analysing mediums' readings, publishing three papers in the SPR's *Journal*. These were generally well received, though the methodology and statistical analyses were subjected to some criticism.

Roy also investigated haunted houses and poltergeist cases, notably a poltergeist at Maxwell Park, Glasgow, in 1974–5, the handling of which influenced the approach adopted by Maurice Grosse and Guy Lyon Playfair at Enfield. These activities led him to be dubbed "Glasgow's ghostbuster". Always concerned about ethics, he balanced a desire for knowledge with his duty towards vulnerable witnesses, and he brought keen psychological insight to the dynamics of a situation. His down-to-earth approach was indicated by his self-deprecating description of himself as a "paranormal plumber" in his efforts to resolve cases.

A prolific and versatile writer, he published about 20 books, some on astronomy, but also six novels, which usually included a paranormal element; more than 70 scientific papers; and many articles. His books on psychical research, *A Sense of Something Strange, Investigation into the Paranormal* (1992) and *Archives of the Mind* (1996) were influential, but his last major work, *The Eager Dead* (2008), 10 years in the writing, was something of a bombshell.

This is a lengthy examination of the famous cross-correspondences produced by a number of mediums, widely separated geographically, in the first decades of the 20th century. The method essentially was for each medium to receive, independently, parts of messages from a group of deceased communicators. Only when the pieces were combined would a message become clear, indicating the survival of the message's communicator.

But the aim went beyond proving an ability to transmit complex classical allusions. Roy's book outlines *The Plan*, hatched by the alleged communicators to create a new Messiah who would usher in world peace. The scheme resulted in a child, Henry, born in 1913 to Winifred Coombe Tennant (the medium Mrs Willett) and Gerald Balfour, both of whom happened to be married to other people. While Henry's paternity had been known to some, this was the first time it had been made public. Roy details the ins and outs of the cross-correspondences (necessarily simplified) and *The Plan*, maintaining a remarkably non-judgemental tone.

Roy was always happy to discuss his activities and was a welcome media guest, appearing regularly on BBC Scotland television and radio programmes. A clear and witty speaker, for many years he and Robertson gave evening classes in psychical research at Glasgow University's Department of Adult and Continuing Education. He possessed an outgoing personality and was a noted raconteur. His love of poetry made him a sought-after speaker at Burns suppers. He played the organ and painted, and was an adequate amateur magician. His sense of humour can be gauged by his remark that "if I die and I find out I have *not* survived, I will be very surprised!" One hopes that he is not in a state of surprise, and is still examining celestial mechanics.

Archibald Edminston Roy BSc, PhD, FRAS, FRSE, FBIS, astronomer and psychical researcher, born Yoker, Glasgow 24 June 1924; died Drumchapel Hospital, Glasgow 27 Dec 2012, aged 88.

Tom Ruffles

FILIP COPPENS

Coppens was an investigative journalist with a passion for the ancient world. His tagline "Ancient wisdom will give us a future" encapsulated his beliefs and underscored his enthusiasm. We first met in London in 2006. He was editor of *Frontier Magazine*, a regular contributor to *Nexus Magazine* and author of *The Stone Puzzle of Rosslyn Chapel* (2002), *The Canopus Revelation: Stargate of the Gods and the Ark of Osiris* (2004) and *The Secret Vault* (2006), co-authored with the French researcher André Douzet. Back then, Coppens was best known for his research into the mystery of Rennes-le-Château and, in particular, Perillos, an offshoot of the legend that he and Douzet championed on their popular Société Perillos website.

Coppens was a fixture in the esoteric revival that peaked before the millennium and continued through the Dan Brown era, and was frequently cited as a key research contributor to many of the genre's quintessential works. This led to a series of allegations and warnings from authorities, involving his access to others' private information.

In 2007, Coppens teamed up with Dutch performing artist and Rennes-le-Château researcher, Corjan de Raaf, and me on *Radio Rennessence*, an Internet radio programme that featured interviews with prominent figures in the Rennes-le-Château mystery. In that same year he published *Land of the Gods* and *The New Pyramid Age*. In an article entitled "Dogon Shame", he helped debunk a claim that the *Dogon Ayantu* (spiritual leaders) of Mali had astronomical knowledge they could only have obtained from visitors from Sirius.

In February 2009 *Radio Rennessence* interviewed author Kathleen McGowan, and that spring I travelled with Coppens, McGowan, Douzet and author Maryange Tibot on a research trip through the French Pyrenees and Northern Spain, a region that had inspired Coppens to write *Servants of the Grail* (2009). The seeds of Coppens's and McGowan's relationship were sown and they married in a private ceremony in Rennes-le-Château in July 2012.

Coppens moved from his home near Edinburgh to Los Angeles and began a new life with McGowan, with whom he co-hosted the *Spirit Revolution* radio show and conducted Sacred France tours. He contributed to popular television documentaries, including *Ancient Aliens*, although privately he was focused on more spiritual matters. At the same time his books continued in the tradition he had established, with *The Ancient Alien Question* (2011), *2012: Science or Fiction?* (2012), *The Lost Civilization Enigma* (2012), *Killing Kennedy* (2012) and *The Cryptogram of Rennes-le-Château* (2012). His final book, *Mysteries of the Ancient World*, is due out this year.

Filip Coppens, writer, born Sint-Niklaas, Belgium 25 Jan 1971; died from angiosarcoma, Los Angeles 30 Dec 2012, aged 41.

Andrew Gough

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A Japanese man has been arrested on suspicion of biting his adult son to death to get ride of a "snake haunting him". TV Asahi reported that Katsumi Nagaya, 53, seriously injured his son, Takuya, 23, on 18 January. He is reported to have head-butted and bitten him after Takuya began writhing around, claiming to be a serpent. The son was declared dead after being taken to hospital. The suspect reportedly told police he had attacked his son to remove the snake from his mind. *Canberra Times, 22 Jan 2013.*

A patient froze to death after doctors at a Russian hospital sent him to a morgue freezer while he was still alive. The 57-year-old man had been declared dead after his apparently lifeless body was found at his flat in Pskov. But a post-mortem examination found he was alive when he went into the morgue. Tow doctors were suspended. *Metro, 11 Feb 2013.*

A driver in Argentina, three times over the drink-drive limit, hit and killed a cyclist and then drove 10 miles (16km) with the corpse stuck through the windscreen with head and torso inside the vehicle on the diver's side, and legs on the bonnet. It was only when Pablo Daniel Garcia, 28, reached a tollbooth near Buenos Aires that an employee called police. According to the *Sun*, Garcia asked if he had to pay for two people. Cyclist Reinaldo Ricardo Rodas, 53, was killed instantly in the collision. *MX News (Sydney), Sun, 22 Feb 2013.*

At 11pm on 28 February, Jeff Bush, 36, disappeared after a 30ft (9m) -wide sinkhole opened up under his bedroom in Brandon, a suburb of Tampa, Florida. His brother Jerry heard a crash, then screams. He jumped into the 20ft (6m) -deep hole and started digging, up to his neck in earth. "I swear I could hear him holler for me to help him," he said, but then added: "I know in my heart, he's dead." A sheriff's deputy arrived just in time to drag him to safety. The missing man's aunt was inside the house with four other adults and a child when the sinkhole opened. Two days later, police called off the search and a wrecking crew moved in to demolish the four-bedroomed concrete house. Jeff Bush could not be declared dead with his body still missing. As the sinkhole was now reportedly 100ft (30m) deep and continuing to grow, two adjacent houses were evacuated and the residents, who were given half an hour to gather their belongings, will probably never be allowed to live in them again. Sinkholes are common in Florida, where underlying limestone and dolomite sometimes collapse after being worn away by water and chemicals. *Guardian, 2 Mar; D.Telegraph, 2+4 Mar; D.Mirror, 4 Mar 2013.*

On 13 May 2011, Deyan Deyanov, a 29-year-old Bulgarian, attacked Jennifer Mills-Westley, 60, a retired road safety officer from Norwich unknown to him, in a Los Cristianos supermarket in Tenerife. He decapitated her with two knives and then ran out carrying her head by the hair. At his trial in the provincial court in Santa Cruz de Tenerife last February, Dayanov said, "I use crack and LSD," before claiming to be haunted by voices telling him how to act. "I've heard voices for five years," he said. "They tell me I'm an angel of Christ, sent to create a new Jerusalem. They are like my commanders. Sometimes they tell me to kill, sometimes to fight, sometimes to pray." Deyanov had been diagnosed with acute paranoid schizophrenia, sectioned and admitted to a Rhyl, North Wales, psychiatric hospital in the summer of 2010, but left that October and moved to Tenerife in the Canary Islands, where he slept rough. After the jury's verdict, he said (in Bulgarian): "I am the second reincarnation of Jesus Christ and I will bring the fire of the Holy Spirit upon this court." He was sentenced to 15 to 20 years in a secure psychiatric unit. *D.Telegraph, Sun, 19+23 Feb; Metro, 19 Feb, 1 Mar 2013.*

James Campbell, 68, was run over and killed on his drive in Cantonment, Florida, by his own car when his dog stepped on the accelerator. *D.Star, 17 Jan 2013.*

Sharai Mawera was having sex with her boyfriend at a secluded spot near the Zambezi river in Zimbabwe when a lion pounced on her and mauled her to death. The unnamed boyfriend, a fisherman, fled naked and raised the alarm. Police and rangers from the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority rushed to the scene, near the town of Kariba, where they found Ms Mawera's body. The same lion was thought to have killed a man the previous weekend as he walked home from a nightclub. *D.Mail, Metro, 7 Mar 2013.*

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ALIENS PREFER BRUMMIES

Just when you thought the alien abduction craze had passed, along comes a survey, commissioned by ITV, that claims three per cent of Britons say they have been space-napped. The poll, for *This Morning's* Paranormal Week in March, asked 2,000 people if they believed in ghosts, angels and aliens/UFOs. Perhaps unsurprisingly, around one third of the respondents said they believed aliens existed and almost one fifth said they had visited Earth. Most surprising wasn't the 7 per cent who had seen a UFO – it was the 2.8 per cent (56 people) who responded "Yes" to the question "Have you ever been abducted by an alien?" But it may be significant that 7 per cent of 18-24 year olds responded 'yes' to the abduction question, compared with just 1 per cent of those over 55. Is this because aliens are more interested in probing teenagers than their more cynical elders? Or is it more likely that some of the younger respondents were of the type who enter 'Jedi Knight' as their religion on a census form? Surveys don't tell us these things; neither do they require their subjects to take lie-detector tests. They also include leading questions: "Have you ever seen a UFO?"might be interpreted by some as "Have you ever seen something odd in the sky?" Others may take it to mean "Have you seen a flying saucer?" Nevertheless, more intriguing was the breakdown of results by gender and region. Women, it seems, are more likely to accept paranormal beliefs than men. But while women are more likely to believe in ghosts and angels, they are *less* likely to believe in aliens and UFOs than their male counterparts. And if you live in Northern Ireland you're less likely to believe in or claim to have experienced any of these things. On the other hand, aliens appear to prefer Brummies. According to the OnePoll survey, if you live in the West Midlands you are eight times more likely to believe that aliens have visited Earth than if you live in Belfast.

ET GAVE ME AN ORGASM

Paranormal Week would not be complete without entertaining *This Morning* viewers with the stories of abductees. Following the unwritten rule that such programmes require 'balance' from sceptical voices, Professor Chris French of Goldsmith's Department of Psychology was invited to join Philip Schofield and Holly Willoughby on *This Morning's* couch. First up was Hilary Porter and Tony Topping. Hilary has been plagued by aliens since childhood, when a disc-shaped UFO landed in her garden. A reptilian dragged her on board where she was stripped and "prodded with a sharp instrument." Today she acts as an 'agony aunt' for those bothered by aliens and receives hundreds of calls from "confused and frightened clients". Tony Topping's UFO experiences began at the tender age of two, when he witnessed a strange figure walking through a wall. By the time he was 22 he was filming strange craft hovering around his house. Viewers saw footage of these 'UFOs' – unremarkable lights in the sky – and an unmarked helicopter that follows Tony around. Confronted with this evidence, Chris French had to concede that, whilst most abduction experiences could be triggered by sleep paralysis, science could not explain everything. This honest admission brought gasps of surprise from Topping. But these were nothing compared to the gasps shared by the third guest, psychic contactee Stephanie Fay Cohen (pictured at left with Chris French), whose story made the others seem a bit run-of-the-mill. Cohen claims she channels a variety of aliens, including cat-people and reptilians from distant solar systems and a Grey called Kayle. So far so familiar, but rather than portraying herself as a victim of alien molestation, she has learned to enjoy the sexual part of the experience. Her body has begun to absorb alien energy "triggering sexual ecstasies I've never experienced before… it can happen anywhere, on the bus, in the shops, or even doing the ironing." Cohen told her story in deadpan fashion, but came unstuck when Philip Schofield asked her to ask her alien friends to describe the appearance of his briefcase, hidden in another room. The all-seeing, omnipresent aliens were suddenly unable, or unwilling, to oblige.

THIS MORNING

Cohen claims she channels alien cat-people and reptilians

McMINNVILLE AGAIN

Many ufologists and, if opinion polls can be trusted, a sizeable portion of the general public continue to believe that UFOs are what the late Graham Birdsall once referred to as "structured craft of unknown origin". The evidence for this, as we have repeatedly suggested, is somewhat slim. When challenged to justify belief in solid, piloted UFOs, the sceptic is often directed to a list of iconic saucer photos. Notwithstanding the fact that we haven't had a 'good' saucer photo for decades, the ardent believer will produce something like the McMinnville photos, taken by farmer Paul Trent and his wife Evelyn in rural Oregon on 11 May 1950 in the halcyon days of American flying saucer fever. There's no doubt that Trent captured an object of some kind on his film but for over 60 years argument has raged as to precisely what this object actually was (see **FT174:22**). Over the years various proponents have argued the Trents were not imaginative or sophisticated enough to fool the world for so long – a familiar argument. But a new analysis, carried out by the French group IPACO, seems to add strength to the hoax hypothesis. IPACO's detailed study indicates that the object was, as many have speculated over the years, a model suspended from the telephone wires that bisect the photograph. The analysis isn't simple to understand but it is essential reading for any serious saucer-head. *www.ipaco.fr/ReportMcMinnville.pdf + www.ufofest.com/*

UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES ASKS WHETHER THE WORLD OF QUANTUM PHYSICS CAN SHED LIGHT ON UFOS

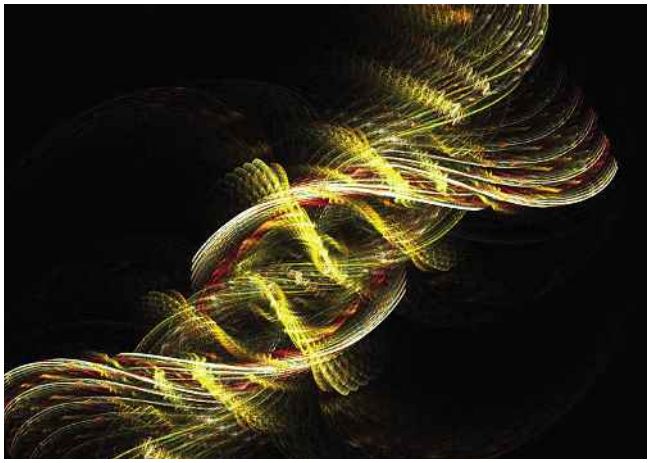
ENTANGLED UFOLOGY

Albert Einstein famously hated "spooky action at a distance", as he called a part of quantum physics that implies magical science lies behind structured reality. Today this phenomenon – known as quantum entanglement (QE) – has become testable and been proven real, causing some UFO theorists to think it might resolve puzzling features of their field. Research over the past few months seems to bolster such speculation.

QE reveals that, at the heart of the Universe, tiny particles such as electrons or photons of light can synchronise (become entangled) in ways that transcend how we normally perceive time and space. If one of a pair (A) is given a measurable property (such as spin) then its entangled cousin (B) will synchronise (e.g. gain opposite spin). If they then shoot across the Universe this entanglement remains, and any change to the property of A means that B must synchronise even if now located light years away. This switch seems instantaneous (and has been measured as at least 10,000 times the speed of light). But while this seems to suggest that these particles somehow communicate at impossible speeds, it's not that simple. Faster-than-light travel may only *appear* to occur without any actual communication across distance, or indeed any movement.

The Universe is nonetheless revealed as interactive at a quantum level. This offers fascinating pointers to fortean topics – like the apparent 'instant' communications between twins across distance, or synchronicities that appear to link disparate events in our lives. As yet, it's early days in terms of comprehending the meaning of pioneer experiments in these areas, though they reveal provocative data. For instance, an October 2012 study by Hagai Eisenberg at the Hebrew University institute of physics in Jerusalem has proved a seemingly absurd theoretical consequence of entanglement. He took two entangled photons, 'A' and 'B', but in measuring them found that 'A' was destroyed by the observational process – a common problem in sub-atomic research). 'B', however, survived. Eisenberg then created a new entangled pair, 'C' and 'D', and entangled 'B' with 'C' from this new pair. Theory predicts that 'D' must now become entangled with 'A'.

In his experiment, Eisenberg proved that this was so. But there is a problem. The experiment confirmed that photon 'D' entangled with 'A' – but photon A no longer existed (nor, indeed, did it exist at the point when 'D' was created). Eisenberg has successfully entangled this new photon with one from the past – or with a dead photon, if you prefer. It's tempting to ponder what this could mean for paranormal research. Caution is advisable, but could there be a clue toward understanding, say, past lives or apparitions if, on some fundamental level of reality, there are measurable links between past and present or live and dead sub atomic particles? Another 2012 experiment at the Quantum Optics unit in Vienna involved teleportation. Several recent projects have successfully 'beamed' photons from one place to another using the synchronisation of particle states. This is not *Star Trek* style matter transportation, but information can be sent in this way.



Witnesses are aware of an object before they see it

In September 2012, the Vienna team beamed data using entangled photons 89 miles (143km) across the Canaries. In another test, they created two pairs of entangled photons – sending one from each pair from port A to port B and the other two to port C. The recipient at B then measured one of the incoming photon pair in such a way that it was either entangled or not entangled with the second photon just received. Whatever choice was thus made dictated the state of the pair at C. They synchronised with those measured at B. Yet the choice made at port B was taken *after* the pair sent to C had been teleported. So how could a choice taken at B alter the two photons already transmitted somewhere else? This implies an ability to change the *past* state of a photon through a decision made afterwards when taking a measurement. Logic says this makes no sense; quantum physics reveals that it happens.

Seth Lloyd at MIT has noted that using future selection of entangled states like this to affect the past might even allow time travel. He adds we can now "create a quantum state in space that previously existed at another point in space". This opens up the possibility of sending a particle back in time without complications like vast energy requirements. Though transmitting macroscopic objects (such as humans) through time is not possible, these new experiments might offer a way to 'time shift' photons – perhaps leading to some kind of 'time image' projector.

How does any of this relate to ufology? Well, the concept of 'cultural tracking' has long been identified within the phenomenon: key features of a sighting seem to spread through time and space as one major sighting is quickly followed by 'clones' all over the world. It's as if giant ripples in human consciousness 'beam' data about the nature of UFOs (airships in the 1890s, flying triangles in the 1990s) and this synchronises everywhere at once. I suspect it is really some kind of subconscious cultural effect, but it is undoubtedly an effect of some sort. However, UFO research group RRR suggest that UFOs might actually *be* giant quantum artefacts and spread as they do because they become entangled with one another around the world. American ufologist Diane Tessman suspects QE at work in a different way, talking about a "condition of mind" in which witnesses seem aware of the presence of an object before they actually see it. This effect (where a witness says that he or she felt a kind of 'tickling' in their minds before looking up to find a UFO hovering) seems to me to involve an energy field emitted by the UFO. Indeed, there are cases where a dog with the witnesses 'sensed' the object at the same time, implying a real physiological effect.

However, as Tessman notes, some scientists suspect that human consciousness is susceptible to effects on a quantum level, and she wonders if there is a QE link between the witness and the aliens in the UFOs – a sort of inter-species cosmic entanglement. I can certainly see how consciousness might contain quantum effects, and this might illuminate many seemingly puzzling phenomena of the mind such as telepathy and precognition. But I have reservations about whether ufology requires that there to be any aliens to become entangled with – though I accept the possibility. Perhaps instead we should consider Lloyd's speculation that recent QE research may lead to a time travel project where future quantum states effect quantum states in the past. *We* are the past when seen from the future! So are today's UFOs evidence of yet-to-happen physics experiments that create measurable effects in *their* past? Are we seeing photonic states within our skies resulting from future quantum physics research that synchronises photons from the future with photons from the past?

UFOs are often perceived as balls of light in the sky that that defy the laws of aerodynamics. Ufologists ask how the 'aliens' who are 'flying' such 'craft' can do such things. But what if there are no craft – just photonic energies rippling 'back from the future' due to quantum entanglement experiments that, from our perspective, have yet to happen?

PETER CUSHING

THE HUMAN FACE OF HORROR

Screenwriter and film fan STEPHEN VOLK feels a huge debt to the "Gentle Man of Horror" who inspired his new novella. He celebrates the great actor's career and life in this, his centenary year.

What makes someone a favourite actor? Not a good actor. That's easy. You could say technique, experience, looks. The kind of profile the camera likes. The ability to make a part their own.

But *favourite* actor? That's more mysterious, and much more intangible.

Peter Cushing had technique in spades. One forgets, but early on he had a rare athleticism – a consummate physicality – whether swordfighting in Sherwood Forest or leaping up and tearing down those tall curtains to blast Dracula to dust with the morning sunlight.

He cared deeply about his craft (famously wearing a white cotton glove when smoking so that he wouldn't be "a 19th century professor of the nicotine stains") and his characters cared about theirs – meticulously. That's what makes them both compelling, and, depending on the role, absolutely chilling. Who can forget the fastidious Dr Frankenstein casually biting the thread as he sews up some scar tissue?

An accomplished artist, Cushing also habitually sketched the costume design of his characters, and, just as often, volunteered much-needed improvements to the screenplays he was given. In fact, when Christopher Lee bemoaned that he had no lines in *Curse of Frankenstein*, Cushing's famous and characteristic rejoinder was, "Count yourself lucky, dear boy. Have you read the script?"

Extraordinary to think that, such was the depth of the friendship that grew between the two men, Lee repeated several times later in life his conviction that Cushing died because "he was simply too good for this world".

So what was that enigmatic something that made him not just a film star, but someone so beloved by so many?

A FOUNDATION FOR FANTASY

When I first snuck, under-age, into X-films in my local fleapit and was exposed to the full glory of the Hammers – *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed* was possibly the first, and still one of my favourites – it was abundantly clear that Cushing was the firm foundation upon which the fantasies were built. However garish, however melodramatic, he took them seriously. For 90 minutes, he made the unreal *real*.

Only rarely did he perform with his tongue firmly in his cheek – the shop owner of *Beyond the Grave*, or his "mad professor" act as Doctor Who. Generally, this actor who'd worked with Olivier kicked the Abbott and Costello era of horror into touch with his intensity and integrity.

For me his most famous roles, Frankenstein and Van Helsing, both have intellectual strength tinged with tragedy, a troubled quality beneath their drive. The vampire hunter is afflicted with a coldness necessary to his crusade, while the Baron's evil is counterpointed by the zeal of a misunderstood scientist convinced he is doing good.

MOVIEPIX / GETTY IMAGES

REFLECTIONS ON CUSHING

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

Peter Cushing's position in the pantheon of the British horror film cannot be overestimated. He is as important as his friend and colleague Christopher Lee; the pitting of the two actors against each other in innumerable films often represented intellect and reason against the forces of destruction (most frequently, Cushing for the former, and Lee for the latter). Cushing had enjoyed considerable television success before his typecasting as a horror actor (including a memorable Winston Smith in a controversial television adaptation of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, set against the O'Brien of André Morrell with whom Cushing was work again in later years, most notably in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*). Cushing was also an acclaimed Darcy in a TV adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. Apart from the mellifluous speaking voice – one of his principal assets as an actor – Cushing was famous for his teasing out of the physicality of the characters he played (in parallel with the intellectual acumen), a skill he was particularly fastidious about cultivating. In order to make (for instance) Frankenstein's ministrations over a bloody operating table plausible, the actor would consult doctor friends in order that his physical movements presented an image of verisimilitude, however unlikely the activities of his character.

Barry Forshaw, author of *Nordic Noir* and the forthcoming *British Gothic Cinema*

I was drawn to monsters at a very early age, and a hero is only as great as his monsters are evil and frightening. Later, when I began to read voraciously, I would learn many lessons about heroes and monsters, but, early on, the best of those lessons came from Hammer Films and the great performances of Peter Cushing. Though sometimes he played the monster himself, what stuck with me was Cushing's stalwart nobility, that grim, get-it-done-at-all-costs determination that he seemed to carry with him from role to role.

Christopher Golden, author of *The Shadow Saga* and editor of *Zombie: An Anthology of the Undead*

Peter Cushing once said he played every role as if it were Hamlet. He was probably misquoted, but Cushing's magic touch was to take seriously the cinema of the fantastic. His heroes, antiheroes and villains were plausible and fallible: scientists, medical men, scholars and similar strivers who, more often than not, sought a better world and were prepared to do whatever it took to achieve a goal. They reached for the stars but were rooted to earth via feet of clay. In becoming identified with Baron Frankenstein,

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Peter Cushing's debut as the obsessed Baron in Hammer's seminal 1957 *The Curse of Frankenstein*. The monster, of course, was played by Cushing's longtime co-star and friend Christopher Lee.

Watching his close-up in the ballroom scene in *The Vampire Lovers* or the twitch of an eyebrow in one of the *Tales of the Unexpected* ("The Vorpal Blade") there can be little doubt Cushing gave a depth and sensitivity the genre often didn't deserve. Part of that was because he had the humility never to think the film, or the part, was beneath him. He made us believe the unbelievable, because once the camera was running, *he* did. That's what made him the monster and monster-hunter with a special place in our hearts.

But his stardom began, ironically, not on the big screen at all but on television. His unforgettable Winston Smith facing the rats in Room 101 saw the BBC inundated with a tidal wave of complaints; so ubiquitous was he with small screen appearances in the Fifties that the joke went round that television was nothing but "Peter Cushing with knobs".

Then, of course, there was his long association with Hammer, and a string of brilliant turns in such wide-ranging films as the epic *She* and the claustrophobic *Cash on Demand*.

He returned to television to play *Sherlock Holmes* in the late Sixties (one of the first BBC drama series in colour).

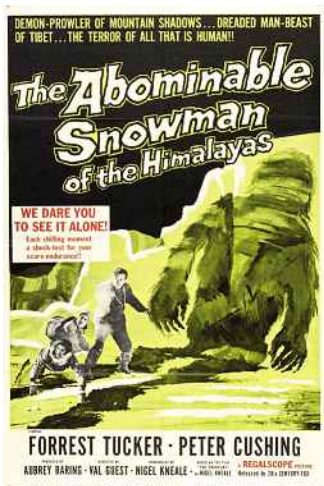
But every day Peter was unable to spend at his wife's side must have been an agony. They were spending more and more time in the Kentish seaside town of Whitstable, where they'd bought a house soon after Peter had starred in Hammer's *Hound of the Baskervilles*, but by now Helen's health was deteriorating. Yet he soldiered on, even appearing in Morecambe and Wise's Christmas Special, reprising the running gag that he

CUSHING GAVE A DEPTH AND SENSITIVITY THE GENRE DIDN'T ALWAYS DESERVE

hadn't been paid. Considering Helen's decline at the time, never was the song "Bring Me Sunshine" more achingly poignant. In 1971, he'd begun filming *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb* just before the fateful day she died.

Peter was utterly shattered. His soul mate had been taken away from him. Life was not worth living any more, and he even considered various methods of suicide – poisonous mushrooms, electricity pylon – as a means to be reunited with her, so bereft was he with grief.

He'd met her for the first time on the steps of Drury Lane, looking like a tramp with a battered suitcase, but "so attractive", she'd recall. He'd joke later in life that she'd married him for his money, when the truth was that he only had pennies in his pocket and by no means the certainty he would make it as an actor, let alone a star. But Helen's belief in him was unwavering, even when he doubted himself. She happily let her own career fade into the background as his took off. Peter, I think, remained a little baffled that she – or anyone – could love him so selflessly.

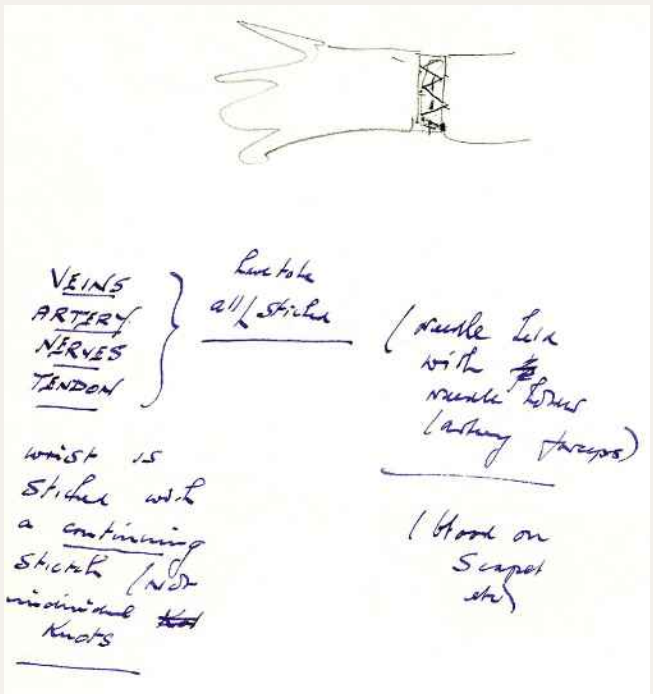

DEMON-PROWLER OF MOUNTAIN SHADOWS... DREADED MAN-BEAST OF TIBET... THE TERROR OF ALL THAT IS HUMAN!!
The Abominable Snowman of the Himalayas
WE DARE YOU TO SEE IT ALONE!
FORREST TUCKER · PETER CUSHING

PETER CUSHING THE ARTIST

WAYNE KINSEY examines a less well-known side of the celebrated actor

Behind the screams, Peter Cushing was an accomplished artist ("At school I was good at only three things - drawing, rugger and theatricals," he wrote). He was a protégé of the famous painter Edward Seago, who nurtured his watercolour painting, and Cushing displayed his work at various fine art exhibitions. During leaner times in his early career his artistic talents were put to practical use. He would leave his wife Helen humorous cartoons written in phonetic prose (creating a cartoon caricature of himself called Bois – the S silent – based on Helen's nickname for him: Boy). Such cards were given to her on Valentine's day, wedding anniversaries, birthdays and at Christmas. He also painted scarves and designed jewellery for her. One of his scarves was spotted by a textile manufacturer, who gave Cushing a contract to design them; he later discovered Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, wearing one of them!

In later life he lunched at the Tudor Tea Rooms in Whitstable and there drew caricatures of the patrons on scraps of newspaper, collecting them in notebooks. Professionally, he was interested in costumes and painted beautiful watercolour examples as suggestions for the filmmakers. Some were painted in his richly annotated scripts. His Frankenstein ones would contain the fruits of research conducted at his family doctor, with notes, doodles and sketches of basic anatomy and how to hold surgical instruments. Between 1958-69 he also built a series of exquisitely detailed model theatre scenes (it used to take him about a year to complete one), which could be inserted into a model stage incorporating a lighting rig with control board that allowed variable lighting for each set. The scenes varied from a Dickensian street to ancient Egypt and from Sherwood Forest to the wheel and poop deck of a ship.



*Many of these treasures have been collected together in **The Peter Cushing Scrapbook** by Wayne Kinsey, Tom Johnson and Joyce Broughton (Cushing's secretary and aide for 35 years) to celebrate his centenary. The book is limited to 2,000 copies and has 328 full colour pages featuring 1,800 images and a foreword by George Lucas. It is only available from www.peverilpublishing.co.uk*

TOP: A self portrait. **LEFT**: The actor's script for *Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell*, complete with his notes on hand anatomy. **RIGHT**: A series of sketches made on scraps of newspaper over lunch at Whitstable's Tudor Tea Rooms.

REFLECTIONS ON CUSHING

Professor Van Helsing, John Banning, Sherlock Holmes and Robert Knox, Cushing brought discipline, ice, intellectual rigour and a touch of madness to figures too often treated as caricatures. That was his gift, and his legacy to cinema.
Tony Earnshaw, author of *An Actor and a Rare One: Peter Cushing as Sherlock Holmes*

What drew me to Peter Cushing when I first saw him as a kid in *The Evil of Frankenstein* was his character's command of any situation and Cushing's command of his character. It did not matter if he played Baron Frankenstein, Van Helsing, or Grand Moff Tarkin – he created believable characters in unbelievable situations. In real life, he was a genuinely nice guy who appreciated his fans. Peter Cushing will be remembered for a long, long time for these exceptional qualities.
Christopher Gullo, author of *In All Sincerity... Peter Cushing*

He was one of my icons as a boy, along with Christopher Lee, Tom Baker, Charlton Heston, Burt Reynolds and John Wayne. In the foolish games we used to play, being Peter Cushing was even a fought-over role. Which was odd, because unlike other stars of that time he often played roles that were heroic and admirable but didn't involve many weapons or much fighting. What lingers most in my impression of his work, and which makes him the most fascinating of screen actors, is the sensitivity, intelligence, grace, and the quiet, gentlemanly strength he brought to his performances. He was also often the best thing in the films he appeared in, and resonated beyond them with the kind of quality you rarely remember from B pictures.
Adam Nevill, author of *Apartment 16, The Ritual*, and *Last Days*

Peter Cushing changed my life in so many ways it's quite difficult to count them all. When I was nine it was his performance in Hammer's *Frankenstein and the Monster From Hell* that made me want to be a surgeon, and when I finally walked out of medical school a qualified doctor it was his learned, authoritative, reassuring and never patronising performance as Van Helsing that I wanted to emulate in my clinical practice. I very much hope that I still do so to this day. As an actor he taught me to set my own high standards and to stick to them to the very best of my ability, but always to do so with grace and kindness, and to maintain a sense of humour about work and life in general. I could not have asked for a better role model as a boy, and while it is a great shame that he is no longer with us, this world of ours was greatly enriched by the time he spent in it.
John Llewellyn Probert MD, FRCS, surgeon and author of *Ward 19* and *Wicked Delights*

Peter Cushing was one of the finest screen actors Britain has ever produced – he never coasted through anything, no matter the circumstances, and could do the iciness of his Baron Frankenstein and the warmth of his Sherlock Holmes with equal commitment and penetrating intelligence.
Kim Newman, author of *Anno Dracula.*

Indeed after her death, he assured many an interviewer that life now consisted of waiting for the happy day he would be reunited with her in whatever afterlife awaited. Of that he was completely certain.

That simple wish is perhaps in strange contradiction to the torrid, blood-and-thunder screen extravaganzas for which he is best remembered. Or perhaps not.

Perhaps there was always a quest for spiritual peace in those sky-blue eyes. A sense that truth, and love, were what really mattered. And his best characters either wielded love as a weapon, or suffered through the absence of it.

WRITING *WHITSTABLE*

As a writer you never know where ideas come from, but one morning I said to my wife I had an idea for a story about Peter Cushing just after his wife died. He's walking along the beach at Whitstable, and a boy comes up to him who thinks he really *is* Van Helsing, and the boy says his stepfather is a vampire. "And of course he isn't," said my wife. And I immediately thought: "You're right. He isn't. That's much more interesting."

The novella is called *Whitstable*. It takes place in 1971 in the tragic aftermath of Helen's death, when Peter has to face a monster far more real than any of the evil creatures in his "fairy tale" (as he called them) Hammer adventures – one that threatens to tear his vulnerable life into tatters.

> HIS LIFE NOW CONSISTED OF WAITING FOR THE HAPPY DAY THEY WOULD BE REUNITED

Given that I was writing fiction, I had to be as accurate as possible about the man and his world, but what I wanted to achieve more than anything was to write a story about Peter Cushing, the actor, as hero. Not as the mythic monster-hunter we all know from the movies, but as a good human being.

I'm 58 (ironically, the age Peter Cushing was when the story is set), and I think in middle-age we writers have an urge to look back, not only to examine our own lives, but the books, films and people that have meant a lot to us in our formative years, and this project is certainly attributable, in part at least, to that impulse.

I also knew that if it was about that time

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Cushing painting on the beach at Whitstable in 1960 and sporting a Sherlock Holmes deerstalker.

ABOVE: A dapper looking Peter Cushing photographed at home in Whitstable in 1986.

and that place, it could not only be about evil. It had, inevitably, to be about love.

One can almost imagine Peter (who insisted he be buried alongside Helen at a secret location) echoing Thornton Wilder's words: "We ourselves shall be loved a while and forgotten. But the love will have been enough; all those impulses of love return to the love that made them. Even memory is not necessary for love. There is a land of the living and a land of the dead, and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning."

The horror writer Gary McMahon has said that when he was growing up he felt Cushing was a surrogate father – a "good father". Without going quite that far, with my own dad obsessed by sport and not much else, I think I badly needed a role model who shared my passion for the supernatural, the grotesque, the fantastic. And there was an implicit sense that Peter Cushing understood these things. Understood *us*.

Daniel Mendelsohn says: "The writers we absorb when we're young bind us to them, sometimes lightly, sometimes with iron"; and the same goes, sometimes, for actors. They live again on the flickering screen or on DVD, resurrected like ghosts. They haunt us, and protect us with the wisdom of their stories like benevolent ancestors.

I, for one, wish Cushing had been given more opportunities to shine. I'd love to have seen him play Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*, and in my head I've dreamt of him playing Nigel Kneale's Quatermass (why on earth didn't he?). But it's more than enough to be content with the marvellous moments we do have: Cushing staring into the eyes of Kneale's *Abominable Snowman*. Decapitating Ingrid Pitt with the swish of a sword in *The Vampire Lovers*. The stunning scene at the burning windmill in *Brides of Dracula*. The heart-stopping pathos of Grimsdyke in *Tales from the Crypt*. The immaculate spats of Dr Frankenstein…

Not forgetting the final, wonderful interview alongside Christopher Lee, full of good-hearted banter and Saint Peter's mischievous laugh, childishly infectious to the last.

Now that he has been officially named a "Great Briton" with his face on a Royal Mail stamp to prove it, I only hope that his contribution to the horror genre will be remembered by new generations who have had the mixed blessing of growing up with *The Human Centipede*, *Saw III* and *Texas Chainsaw 3D*. I'm confident it will be. Quality, after all, never goes out of fashion.

My friend and fellow Hammer devotee, the acclaimed novelist Mark Morris, has written a heartfelt introduction to *Whitstable*, and it gives me a great deal of hope to learn that his teenage daughter, Polly, has said that Peter Cushing is *her* favourite actor, too.

As I type these words, a model of his Van Helsing sits on my desk brandishing two candlesticks in the shape of a crucifix pointed at my keyboard. He keeps me on my toes. In the absence of God, he looks over me. And, ludicrous as it sounds, I'm comforted by that.

If my novella serves to honour in some small way the many hours of enjoyment the man has given me, and the debt I owe him for kindling my imagination, not to say setting me on the road to writing in the British gothic cinema tradition, I'll be more than happy.

For me, to mis-quote Peter's dedication to Helen in his autobiography – it is *he* who "shines in my heart like a good deed in a naughty world". FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

STEPHEN VOLK is the BAFTA award-winning writer behind the infamous BBC Hallowe'en "hoax" *Ghostwatch* and the ITV drama series *Afterlife*. His most recent screen credit was *The Awakening* starring Rebecca Hall and Dominic West, and his previous fiction includes the books *Dark Corners* and *Vardøger*. His website is www.stephenvolk.net.

Peter Cushing was my first hero. While my friends all had pictures of pop stars on their walls, I had a photo of Cushing in *The Vampire Lovers*. During my confused childhood, his performances as Van Helsing and Baron Frankenstein were a kind of cultural bedrock. I often joke that after my father left, Cushing's Van Helsing became a kind of surrogate father to me. It's only half a joke. Watching Cushing on TV, staying up later than I should have at that age, I was taught about honour and dignity, courage, self respect and heroism, and what it really means to be a man. No mean feat for a sad-looking bloke in some daft horror films. When I think of Cushing now, I am filled with a deep, abiding fondness. He seems wrapped up in the same soft, warm glow of memories inhabited by my late grandparents. I took his death personally; I mourned him as if I knew him. There has never been anyone else like Peter Cushing, and there never will. He was our Peter, and we'll always cherish him.

Gary McMahon, author of *The Concrete Grove novels* and the *Thomas Usher* series

I first encountered Peter Cushing in *The Brides of Dracula* when I was 10 or 11 years old, and his dashing, elegant, reassuring presence then accompanied me through an adolescence dominated by the movies of Hammer and Amicus – movies that captivated me, terrified me, inspired me, and molded me into the person I am today. Although Cushing was in several less-than-brilliant films over the years, there is not a single instance where he fails to imbue a film with a touch of class simply by being in it. As well as being an impeccable actor and a gentle man, for me he remains the perfect role model and a hero in the truest sense of the word.

Mark Morris, author of *Toady* and *Stitch*; editor of *Cinema Macabre*

I grew up with the *Hammer House of Horror* TV series, and remember being terrified. Sadly, Cushing only appeared in one episode – 'The Silent Scream' – but it was all the more memorable for that. He effortlessly portrays the creepy mad scientist, with his serial killer style glasses and straight demeanour… he's sinister and frightening and yet entirely earnest in a way only Cushing could be.

Alison Littlewood, author of *A Cold Season* and *Path of Needles*

Peter Cushing brought a rare elegance and wit to his characterisations, and reinvented several of the most iconic characters in horror and suspense: Frankenstein, van Helsing, Sherlock Holmes. His Frankenstein begins as a committed scientist and only gradually reveals the depths of his obsessiveness. His Van Helsing is the most intelligent and persuasive version of the figure. He could be poignantly vulnerable – see his bank manager in *Cash on Demand* or indeed his Knox (another man blinded by a scientific obsession) in *The Flesh and the Fiends*. He made not just the characters but many of their lines so much his own that they might have been written for him (I imagine some were). Like all the greats in our field, he never gave less than his best, even when the films let him down.

Ramsey Campbell, author of *The Nameless*, *Midnight Sun* and *The Grin of the Dark*

PETER CUSHING LIVES IN WHITSTABLE

DAVID SUTTON looks back at how a screen horror legend became a much-loved local hero

Peter Cushing lives in Whitstable
I have seen him on his bicycle
I have seen him buying vegetables
Peter Cushing lives in Whitstable
– The Jellybotties

As a Canterbury boy, I always knew that Peter Cushing lived in Whitstable, seven miles to the north. The fact that the star of the films that stirred my young imagination – *The Curse of Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *The Mummy* – was a local seemed entirely natural. After all, Oliver Postgate and Peter Firmin – creators of a Golden Age of fortean children's television with *Pogles' Wood*, *Clangers* and *Noggin the Nog* – worked just up the road in their barn in Blean, and everyone knew that *Carry On* legend Charles Hawtrey was running amok in the pubs of nearby Deal. Peter Cushing was part of an imaginary yet everyday landscape that existed both on and off the television screen. And if you were lucky enough to meet him, he was just the gentlemanly figure you expected him to be, giving sweets to children and even a much-coveted *Star Wars* prop to one of my schoolfellows.

Cushing and his wife Helen had been frequent weekend visitors to Whitstable in the 1950s, and settled there permanently in 1959, buying 3 Seaway Cottages, facing directly onto the beach. Looking up at it today, you can see the outsized windows he had installed at the top of the house to provide sea views and excellent light for his painting (see p31). He loved Whitstable, referring to it as 'the Village' because of its sense of community, and was cherished and protected, especially after Helen's death in 1971, by the town's inhabitants. As Joyce Broughton, his secretary for 30 years, put it: "The people loved him, so they left him alone to live an ordinary, quiet life."

So, as the Jellybotties' song (resurrected on *QI*; the original is superior) says, one would indeed see him on his bicycle (before a broken hip forced him to give it up in 1988), buying vegetables or taking lunch and sketching in the Tudor Tea Rooms (it's still there, virtually unchanged, and serves a memorable steak and kidney pudding; as is the similarly splendid VC Jones, which the actor would visit for its excellent cod and chips). The famous carpet slippers George Lucas allowed him to wear (out of shot) in *Star Wars* were probably purchased at Wooley's on the high street. In 1992, he donated a bench from his garden to a spot known as 'Cushing's View' at Keam's Yard. It is inscribed: "Presented by Helen and Peter Cushing who love Whitstable and its people so very much". Helen, of course, had passed away some 20 years earlier, but Peter continued to sign letters from both of them as he had done when she was alive.

He followed his beloved wife on 11 August 1994 at the age of 81. On the 19th, he made his final journey through Whitstable. The town's shops were closed as a mark of respect and thousands of people lined the streets to watch the coffin pass.

His presence is still felt today, and many Whitstable people have fond memories of the shy screen legend who lived among them. The old Oxford cinema where his films once played is now a pub called The Peter Cushing. Many objected to the name, and it's hard to imagine the actor appreciating this particular tribute. More fittingly, perhaps, Whitstable Museum and Gallery holds a small permanent collection relating to Cushing. In this centenary year, it also hosts a major exhibition – 'Peter Cushing at 100' – celebrating the man and his work. It's a treasure trove of Cushing material that focuses on both the actor and the private man. As well as the movie memorabilia, there's a rare opportunity to view Cushing's accomplished paintings and other creations – hand-painted buttons and scarves, model theatres, sketches and cartoons – as well as photographs, personal belongings and costumes.

I last saw Peter Cushing in 1986, signing the first volume of his autobiography; he rose and bowed to kiss my then-girlfriend's hand, just as he'd done on meeting Lady Diana. As ever, Baron Frankenstein was the perfect gentleman.

With thanks to Manda Gifford and Karen Daniels

Peter Cushing at 100 **runs at the Whitstable Museum and Gallery until 23 June 2013.**
5 Oxford St, Whitstable, Kent CT5 1DB Tel: 01227 276998

CARLO PANGRAZIO

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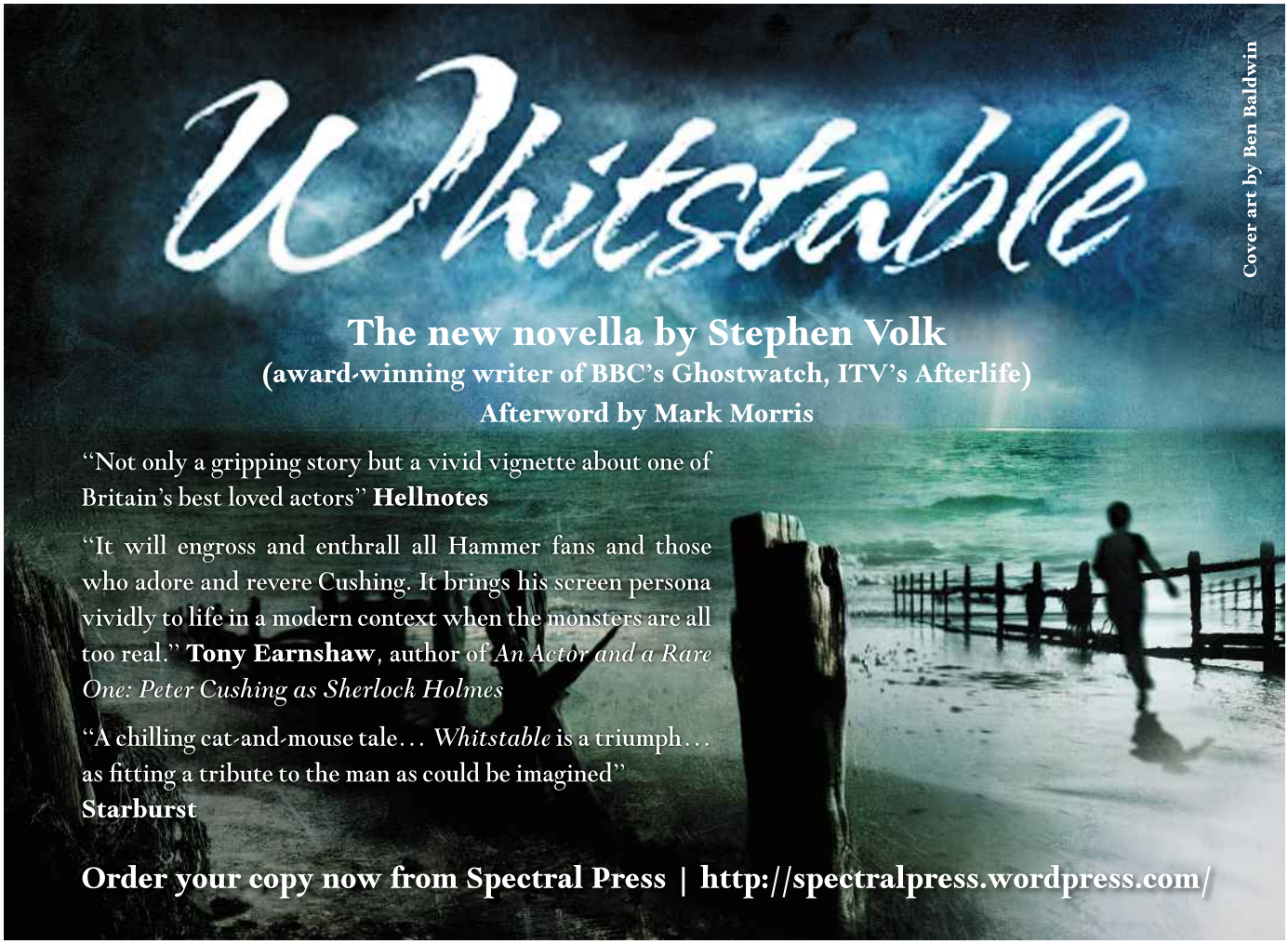
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Peter Cushing at Cushing's View; his home at 3 Seaway Cottages; the Tudor Tea Rooms; part of the 'Peter Cushing at 100' exhibition; on the beach.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WHITSTABLE

BY STEPHEN VOLK

An extract from Stephen Volk's new novella about Peter Cushing

He took off his sunglasses and pulled a white cotton glove from his pocket onto the fingers of his right hand, momentarily resembling a magician, then lit a John Player unfiltered. As he smoked he looked down at his bare left hand which rested on his knee, lined with a route-map of pronounced blue veins. He traced them with his fingertips, not realising that he was enacting the gentle touch of another.

He closed his eyes, resting them from the sun and took into his smoker's lungs the age-old aroma of the sea. Of all the senses, that of smell more than any other is the evoker of memories: and so it was. He remembered with uncanny clarity the last time he and Helen had watched children building "grotters" – sand or mud sculptures embellished imaginatively with myriads of oyster shells – only to see the waves come in and destroy them at the end of a warm and joyful Saint James's Day. Clutching his arm, Helen had said, "Such a shame for the sea to wash away something so beautiful." He'd laughed. His laughter was so distant now.

"Don't worry, my dear. They'll make more beautiful ones next year."

"But that one was special," she'd said, "I wanted that one to stay."

The fresh salt air smarted in his eyes.

"I know who you are," said a disembodied young voice.

Startled, he looked up and saw a boy about ten years old standing at an inquisitive distance, head tilted to one side with slats of cloud behind him and a substantial book under his arm. He and Helen had no children of their own, or pets for that matter, but felt all the children and animals in the town were their friends. He remembered talking to the twins next door and asking what they wanted to be when they grew up – clergyman, sailor – and them innocently turning the question back at him, albeit that he was already in his fifties: What do you want to be when you grow up? Good question, for an actor. But this one, this boy, he didn't recognise at all.

"You're Doctor Van Helsing."

The man's pale blue eyes did not waver from the sea ahead of him.

"So I am."

The boy threw a quick glance over his shoulder, then took a tentative step nearer. He wore short trousers, had one grey sock held up by elastic and the other at half-mast. Perhaps the other piece of elastic had snapped, or was lost.

"I... I saw what you did," he stammered eagerly, tripping over his words, but they nevertheless came ten to the dozen, a fountain. "You... you were powerful. He escaped back to his castle and he... he leapt up the stairs four, five, six at a time with his big strides but you were right behind him. You were determined. And you couldn't find him, then you could. And he was about to go down the trap door but he saw you and threw something at you and it just missed and made a really big clang, and then he was on top of you squeezing the life out of your throat and it hurt really a lot..." The boy hastily put his book between his knees and mimed strangulation with fingers round his own neck. "He had you down on the floor by the fireplace and you couldn't breathe he was so strong and mighty and you went like this –" His eyes flickered and he slumped. "And he was coming right down at you with his pointed teeth and at the last minute you were awake –" The youngster sat bolt upright. "And you pushed him away and he stood there and you stood there too, rubbing your neck like this. And he was coming towards you and your eyes went like this –" He shot a glance to his left. "And you saw the red curtains and you jumped up and ran across the long, long table and tore them down and the sunlight poured in. And his back bent like this when it hit him and his shoe shrank and went all soggy and there was nothing in it. And he tried to crawl out of the sunlight and you wouldn't let him. You grabbed two candle sticks from the table and held them like this –" He crossed his forearms, eyes blazing, jaw locked grimly. "You forced him back and his hand crumbled to ashes and became like a skeleton's, and he covered his face with his hand like this, and all that turned grey and dusty too, and his clothes turned baggy because there was nothing inside them. And everything was saved and the sign of the cross faded on the girl's hand. And after you, you – vanquished him, you looked out of the coloured window at the sky and put your woolly gloves back on. And the dust blew away on the air."

Indeed.

The man remembered shooting that scene very well. The old "leap and a dash" from the Errol Flynn days. Saying to dear old Terry Fisher: "Dear boy, I seem to be producing

crucifixes from every conceivable pocket throughout this movie. Do you think we could possibly do something different here? I'm beginning to feel like a travelling salesman of crosses." He'd come up with the idea himself of improvising using two candlesticks. He remembered the props master had produced a duo at first too ornate to work visually, but the second pair were perfect.

"That was you, wasn't it?"

"I do believe it was," Peter Cushing said.

He did not look at the boy and did not encourage him further in conversation, but the youngster ventured closer as if approaching an unknown animal which he assumed to be friendly but of which he was nevertheless wary, and sat on the wall beside him squarely facing the sea.

The man was now patting his jacket pockets, outside and in.

"What are you looking for?" The boy was curious. "A cross? Only you don't need a cross. I'm not a vampire."

"I'm very glad to hear it. I was looking for a photograph. I usually have some on me… I really don't know where I've put them..."

"A what?"

"A photograph. A signed one." No response. "Of yours truly." Still no response, puzzlingly. "Isn't that what you'd like?"

"No," the boy said, sounding supremely affronted, as if he was dealing with an idiot.

"Oh..."

"I want to ask you something much more important than that. Much more important."

"Oh. I see."

Cushing looked around in a vain attempt to spot any parents from whom this child might have strayed, but there were no obvious

"YOU SAW THE RED CURTAINS AND YOU RAN ACROSS THE LONG TABLE AND TORE THEM DOWN"

candidates in evidence. If the boy had got lost, he thought, then it might be best for him to keep him quietly here at his side until they found him, rather than let him wander off again on his own. He really didn't want this responsibility, and he certainly didn't want company of any sort, but it seemed he didn't have any choice in the matter.

"I said I'm not a vampire." The boy interrupted his thoughts. "But I know somebody who is. And if they get their own way I'll become one too, sooner or later. Because that's what they do. That's how they create other vampires." The child turned his head sharply and looked the man straight in the eyes. "You said so."

Quite right: he had done. It wasn't hard to recall rewriting on set countless scenes of turgid exposition on vampire lore so that they didn't sound quite so preposterous when the words came out of his mouth.

"Who is this person?" Cushing played along. "I probably need to take care of him, then."

"He's dangerous. But you don't mind danger. You're heroic."

Cushing twitched an amused shrug. "I do my best."

"Well it has to be your best," the boy said with the most serious sense of conviction. "Or he'll kill you. I mean that."

"Then I'll be as careful as possible. Absolutely."

"Because if he finds out, he'll hurt you, and he'll hurt me." The words were coming in a rapid flow again. "And he'll hurt lots of other people as well, probably. Loads of them." The boy drew up his legs, wrapped his arms round them tightly and tucked his knees under his chin. His eyes fixed on the horizon without blinking.

"Good gracious," Cushing said. "You mustn't take movies too much to heart, young man."

"Movies? What's movies got to do with it?" The abruptness was nothing short of accusatory. "I'm talking about here and now and you're the vampire hunter and you need to help me." The boy realised his harsh tone of voice might be unproductive, so quickly added, sheepishly: "Please." Then, more bluntly, with an intense frown: "It's your job." FT

Whitstable by Stephen Volk is available from Spectral Press. (http://spectralpress.wordpress.com/2013/01/31/whitstable-news-and-pre-orders/). A special offer includes a 2 x CD set of Peter Cushing reading his autobiography *Past Forgetting: Memoirs of the Hammer Years* (Cosmic Hobo Productions) including sleeve notes by Mark Gatiss.

MAIN PHOTOGRAPH: LEE PELLING

WEIRD

Every place has its strange stories and legends. Peter Cushing's beloved Whitstable is no exception. Local artist QUINTON WINTER presents a playfully uncanny archive from the seaside town...

A recent survey in the *Times* suggested that Whitstable – a pretty old fishing town on Kent's north coast – is one of the 'coolest' places to live in Britain. Famed for its oysters and artists and well-known for being the home of horror legend Peter Cushing, Whitstable undoubtedly has many charms... but delve beneath its surface and you find strange stories and dark secrets; half-forgotten folklore and odd tales hidden in old newspaper clippings.

I've heard many tales of weird goings-on in Whitstable. Once you start to ask around, and dig a little deeper, all sorts of things emerge from the pebbles. There's a rich history here of smuggling, oysters, ghosts, evil or out-of-place animals – and, of course the unholy origin of the town. In my quest for the real, weird Whitstable, I found myself researching in yellowing newspapers, haunting local libraries and talking to men with beards.

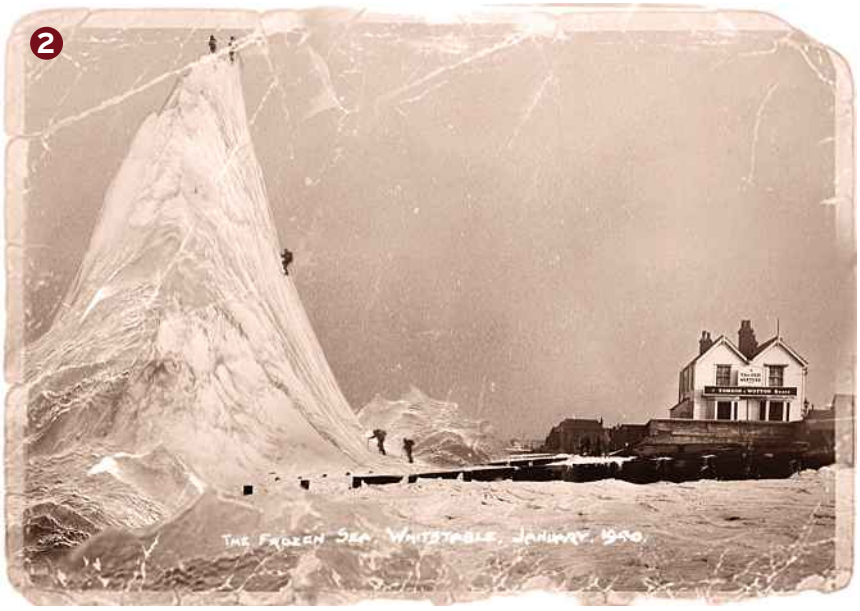
All the tales gathered here are true.

The panther is real.

The giant fox is *definitely* real.

But, as with all folktales and news reports, reality is open to interpretation, and often shades into myth. Could there really be a sea serpent in the waters off the coast near Herne Bay? According to a report from 1935 there is. Or was. I doubt it's still around. Its probably been frightened away by the vibration of the wind turbines.

This growing archive, recently seen as an exhibition at Whitstable's Horsebridge Centre, was born out of love for this funny, **unique** and almost untouched little town – its eccentricities, its history and its folklore. It's **a hom**age to Whitstable's whispered tales, a nod to the old storytelling traditions and the art of the tourist poster. I think that the town's inhabitants have a sense that something else is going on in Whitstable, aside from oysters, gastropubs and baby boutiques – something eerie. I want to reassure them that it's OK – that the howling they've heard in the night isn't their imagination… it's actually a giant fox.



1 MADE BY THE DEVIL

It is told in folktales, whispered on the whisky-tongues of sailors, murmured in the dark, only half un-believed, that the Devil himself created Whitstable…

The story goes like this: After a particularly mischievous spree around Canterbury one winter's night, the Devil flew north, flaming, howling and laughing, heading home to Hell. He was not alone, but with fists full of Canterbury revellers, their houses, and the steeple of Canterbury Cathedral! Feeling very pleased with himself and looking forward

WHITSTABLE

to the fun he would have with his collection, he passed over what is now the Thanet Way, where he was knocked suddenly sideways by a blast of icy wind off the North Sea. The Devil, in his surprise, dropped what he was clutching, scattering houses and people along the coast and thus forming the town of Whitstable. Shivering, the Devil stormed off back to his inferno to warm up.

Some doubt this story. They say the Devil isn't real, and that Whitstable is just an ordinary fishing town. But, if you want proof, just consider where Canterbury Cathedral's steeple now lies… It fell into the sea that night, and can be seen to this day, pointing out into the sea like an accusing finger, its spire shape still clearly visible. This strange feature has been known for as long as anyone can remember as 'The Street'. And some say that if, at midnight, when the tides are right and the Moon is full, you walk out and follow the Street all the way to its end, you will find yourself at the gates of Hell…

❷ THE WAVE MOUNTAIN OF 1940

In the icy winter of 1940, the sea's waves froze and formed ice-mountains. As can be seen in this rare photograph, local climbing clubs used them for practice in wartime.

❸ THE GOOGLE EARTH CRAB

Crabbing is a popular activity for children during the summer. Does this satellite photo of the harbour reveal a giant crab or just an unusual sand formation?

❹ THE GIANT FOX OF WHITSTABLE

As tall as a man and as orange as fire, the Giant Fox of Whitstable cries like a baby in the night. Making headlines in June 2010 (see **FT263:02**), it was dubbed the 'Beast of the Bubble' by the *Whitstable Times*, which carried reports of one local grandmother fending the monster off with a garden chair and another watching as it devoured her pet rabbit before turning on her ("Super Gran fights off giant fox with shovel").

❺ THE WHITSTABLE SEA SERPENT

In the summer of 1935, sunbathers and holidaymakers witnessed a sea serpent near Herne Bay. It was chased away by local boats, but some say it still lives.

This photo from the 1950s proves that not even the Spitfire battles and waves of German bombers had scared the sea serpent away from its old haunts; here it is seen in the

removed from brambles on Tankerton Slopes in the winter of 2011 and verified as genuine *Panthera onca*.

8 THE DEVIL-GULL OF GREEN LANE

In June 2009, a local newpaper reported: "Seagull flies off with cat in beak – Marion Clements, of Green Lane, Whitstable, says she almost choked on her tea when the bird picked the frightened feline up with its BEAK and attempted to fly away."

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

QUINTON WINTER is an artist and illustrator who has worked for *Time Out* and the *Guardian*, illustrated children's books and animated a film about the Staffordshire Treasure Hoard as part of the 2012 Cultural Olympiad 2012. He has exhibited his paintings at the Horsebridge Centre, Whitstable, where his prints and cards are for sale.

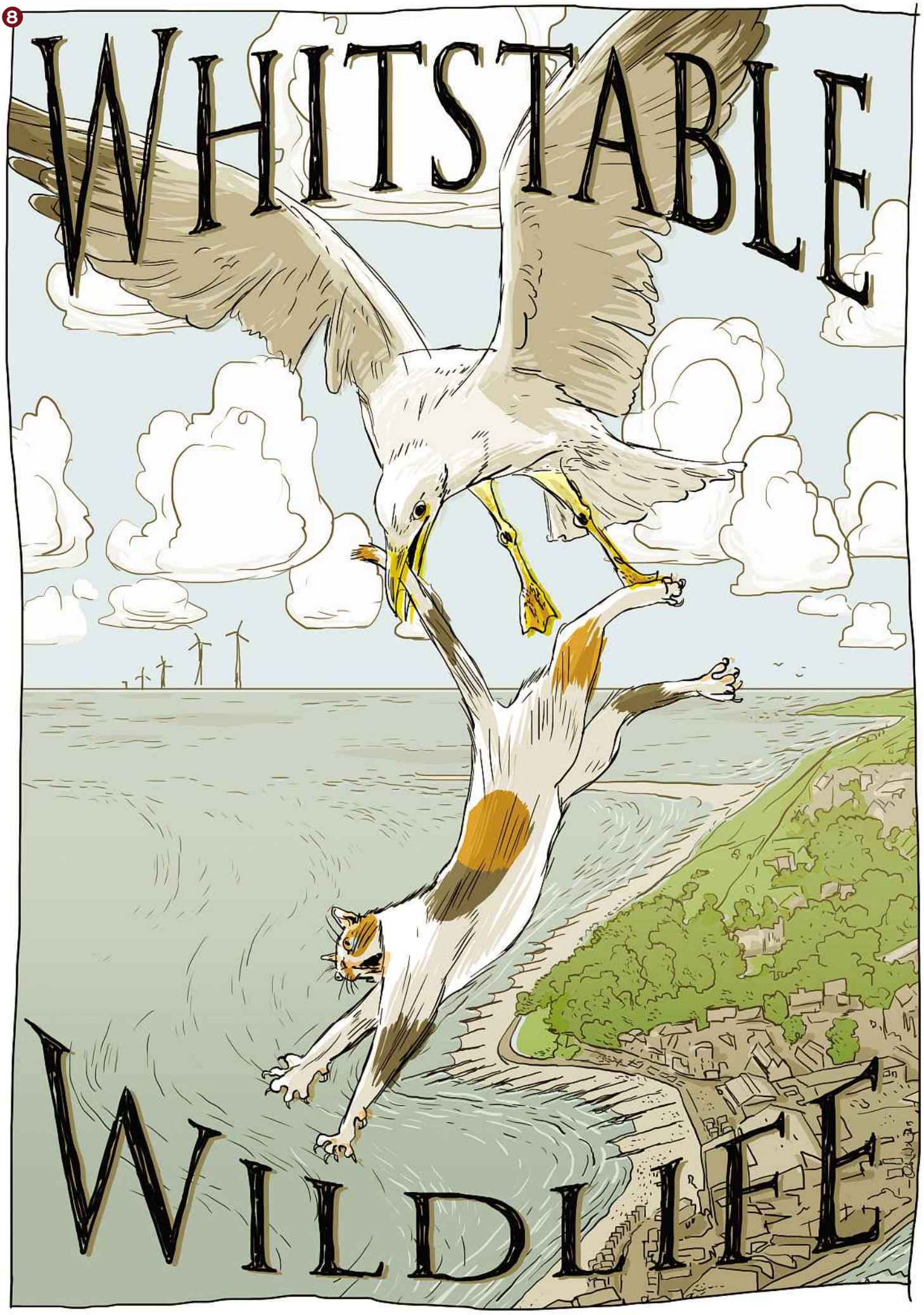
waters off one of the celebrated Maunsell sea forts which lie off the Whitstable coast.

6 THE UNKNOWN EYEBALL

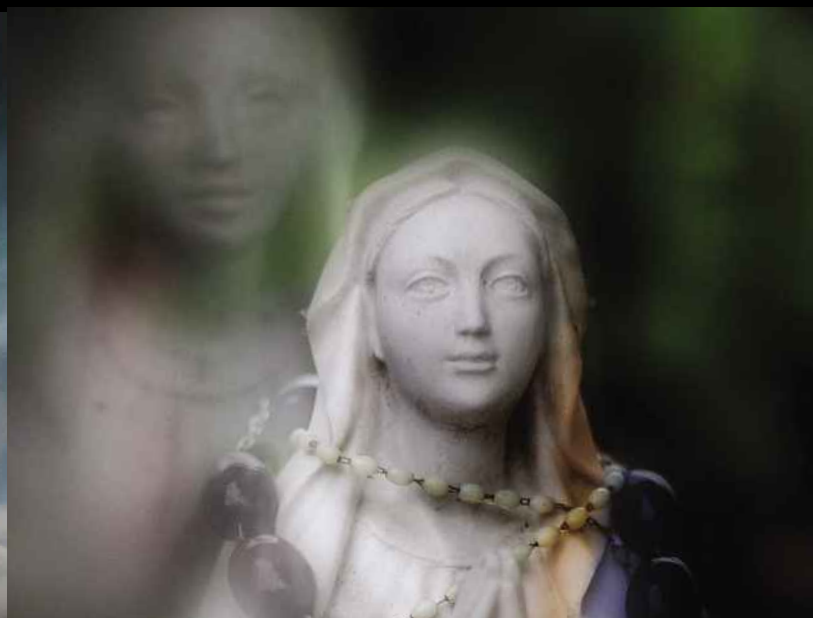
In 1899, locals were astonished and afeared at this incredible eyeball that washed ashore. What creature could this enormous eye have come from? The whale? The squid? The Kraken? What sights had it seen?

7 THE WHITSTABLE PANTHER

By day pleasure seekers rest and play in their beach huts, but as the moonlight falls on Tankerton Slopes, the panther leaps. Is this the real 'Beast of the Bubble'? Panther fur was


WHITSTABLE
WILDLIFE

BELIEVING IMPO



Why do people believe in extraordinary phenomena which often seem to fly in the face of current scientific knowledge? Psychologists have long tried to answer the question, but **PETER LAMONT** argues that a new approach is needed, one that combines historical context, psychological analysis and detailed examination of the specific subjects of belief. After all, we cannot understand belief in the paranormal unless we properly consider the things in which people believe, and just what people believe about them...

An extraordinary thing happened. . . in front of a crowd of strangers, a man asked a woman to think of a word. He asked her to concentrate on the word, and then he looked into her eyes. After a moment or two, he began to speak: it was a word of about six or seven letters, a name, no, an object, and there was a T in the middle, no, there were two. There were two Ts in the middle. She nodded. Don't nod, don't give me any feedback, just concentrate. It's a small thing, not so small, but small in a sense. It's alive, it's an animal, it's a pet and it's very cute. You're thinking of a kitten! She stared at the man. The strangers, who had been staring at him, turned to stare at her. They could tell, simply from the expression on her face, that he had **read her** mind.

Perhaps this was a magic trick, though it is hard to imagine how it could have been done. The woman was asked to think of any word she wanted, and nothing was said or written down. In any case, there was a magician present, and he said that he could not explain how it was done. Some thought it was the result of clever psychological techniques, of reading subtle facial cues. After all, anyone could tell from her facial expression that the man had **read her mind,** so perhaps he was able to pick up on more subtle information? However, there was also a psychologist present, and she was certain that psychological techniques could not account for the demonstration. If it was neither trickery nor psychology, then surely, as others thought at the time, this was a genuine paranormal demonstration? Of course, you were not there, and are understandably sceptical. Nevertheless, the description is accurate, since I was there myself, and saw this (with my own eyes, as all competent observers should). You have my word. [1]

This is rather typical, in certain respects, of cases of extraordinary (i.e. paranormal) phenomena throughout history. It begins with a reported observation of something for which there seems to be no ordinary (i.e.. normal) explanation. Faced with an anomaly, we are forced to consider whether or not it is real. If we are initially sceptical, as everyone claims to be, then we first consider possible ordinary explanations for it. Whatever ordinary explanations come to mind, they need to be rejected before an extraordinary conclusion can be reached. That, after all, is what extraordinary (or paranormal) means: beyond the ordinary (or normal). In other words, belief in anything extraordinary depends upon the exclusion of ordinary explanations.

Others, of course, have not believed, and this is always an option. We can always reject the testimony as untrustworthy, as invention or exaggeration of something less impressive. After all, human observation and memory are notoriously unreliable. Or else we can assume that, though what happened was highly improbable, it was nevertheless coincidence. After all, winning the lottery is highly improbable, yet nevertheless happens to somebody every week. Or else we can assume that it was fraud, despite the failure of magicians and psychologists to explain what was going on. In choosing one of these options, we might admit that we do not have an adequate explanation, but we can nevertheless believe that one exists. In other words, we can always assume that, though the event is unexplained, it is not inexplicable.

OSSIBLE THINGS

ALL IMAGES: ETIENNE GILFILLAN EXCEPT OUIJA BOARD DAVID NEWTON

We therefore have a choice between one belief and another. We can believe that the event has no ordinary explanation, or we can believe that it does have one. And the problems of testimony, chance and fraud always make the latter an available option. So why would anyone believe in extraordinary phenomena? This is the question that psychologists have long seen as the one of primary interest in terms of extraordinary beliefs. And yet it has been answered on a regular basis: people believe because they do not consider the ordinary explanations as adequate for the event in question. After all, as in the above case, they are often barely explanations, lacking not only in detail but also in any supporting evidence. This is a point that believers have been making for a very long time, that ordinary explanations are sometimes inadequate, which is why an extraordinary one is sometimes necessary. One need not agree, of course, and people have also disagreed for a very long time, but it hopefully makes the point that disbelief is not a self-evident position. Thus, instead of wondering why people believe, it might be more useful to consider how people come to the conclusions that they do.

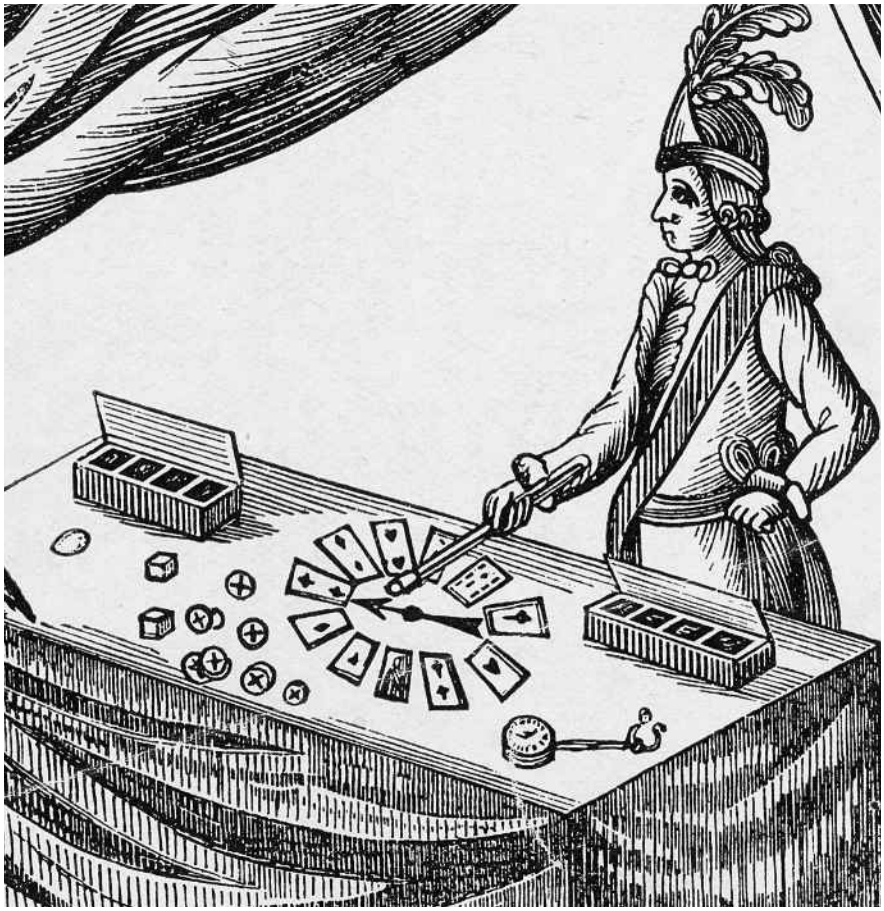
This is partly a matter of individual differences, since there are obviously individuals who believe and individuals who do not. But before we consider individual differences, we need to remember that belief is also a product of social context, since at certain times, and in certain places, almost everyone has accepted the reality of certain extraordinary phenomena. Indeed, what is considered ordinary has varied significantly at different times and places. People believe according to a wider context of plausibility, based upon what they regard as ordinary, and their trust in those they regard as experts to be able to explain things.

There is also the matter of the particular event in question. Regardless of any individual or social factors, what someone believes depends upon particular events. To put it another way, which is the way it is invariably put by both believers and

SOME THOUGHT IT WAS THE RESULT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TECHNIQUES, OF READING SUBTLE FACIAL CUES

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: Fortune-tellers perform extraordinary feats – but are these feats of psychology rather than mind-reading?



HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: In 17th and 18th century England, people would have enjoyed the extraordinary tricks of a conjuror such as this one without assuming that he was performing supernatural acts or practising witchcraft.

disbelievers, it depends upon the evidence, and what counts as adequate evidence will always come down to considerations about particular events. Beliefs are always based upon particular events, since to believe in extraordinary phenomena is to believe that certain events have occurred that are extraordinary.

Within particular social contexts, and in relation to particular events, there will also be differences between individuals – some will believe, some will not. If we are to understand belief in extraordinary phenomena, we must consider both belief and disbelief, since the latter is not an absence of belief, but rather the belief that such phenomena are the result of ordinary processes. We must also consider the social context within which such events took place, since what one makes of an extraordinary phenomenon depends upon what one regards as ordinary. And we must consider the details of the events that are believed to be real, since believers do not believe in just anything.

In the case of the demonstration above, for example, there are several details that made it convincing. The word was freely chosen from millions of possible words. It was not, say, a playing card, which might have been forced, and of which there are only 52. And the word was only thought of, it was not written down, so it is hard to think of any way the man could have known what word was chosen. Furthermore, he could not have divined the word by reading subtle facial cues, since the best this can provide is a reaction to a prompt. Furthermore, a psychologist was present, and she ruled out psychological techniques, and a magician also saw the trick, and said that he could not explain it. If the choice of word had been restricted, or had been written down, or if neither magicians nor psychologists had been present, then the feat would have been less convincing, and fewer people would have believed it was paranormal.

IN 17TH CENTURY BRITAIN, IT WAS NORMAL TO BELIEVE IN MIRACLES, GHOSTS AND WITCHCRAFT

The details of the event and the authority of relevant experts are invariably central to the exclusion of ordinary explanations, and have been regularly given as reasons why individuals believe in extraordinary phenomena. One of the constant themes in the history of extraordinary beliefs has been that people explain why they believe what they do. Ordinary beliefs might be held without a second thought, and may be expressed without justification, but extraordinary beliefs demand reasons, and the expression of such beliefs demands that they are given.

It can be said, of course, that these are not the real reasons for belief, that there are underlying reasons, of which those who believe are unaware, such as gullibility or wishful thinking, to which nobody ever admits. This may be so, but we do not need to take the stated reasons at face value for them to be informative. We can reconsider the questions we ask, and the assumptions we make when we attempt to answer them, including the idea that what people say is a reliable route to belief. In doing so, the reasons people give for their beliefs can help us understand why extraordinary beliefs have been, and continue to be, so common.

There are several other questions to be considered, however, and these require a historical approach. History allows a wide range of extraordinary phenomena to be considered, which were the objects of both belief and disbelief, and which occurred in different social contexts, at times when what was thought to be ordinary or plausible was quite different from today. History allows us to consider phenomena that were similarly extraordinary in certain respects, yet had different names that carried different meanings, and thus provoked different kinds of belief and disbelief. After all, if we are to understand extraordinary belief, then we need to consider not only the events that have been the objects of belief, but also what has been believed about them.

There is, of course, another obvious question, one that almost everyone asks themselves about an extraordinary phenomenon, such as the one described above: was it 'real'? In this case, at least, the answer is simple: it was a trick witnessed by the author, performed by a fellow magician. The details may be imperfect, since memory is imperfect, but had you been there, you would have seen something very close to what was described. The psychologist could not explain it because it did not rely upon psychological techniques, and the magician who said that he could not explain it said so out of politeness. This is a not uncommon ruse used by magicians when asked about a performance of a fellow magician. The result is that this particular feat remains unexplained, but it is not inexplicable (you have to trust me on this, since I am not about to reveal the secret).

SOME EXTRAORDINARY BELIEFS PAST AND PRESENT

The term 'extraordinary' has been chosen because we are discussing events that are, and consistently have been, beyond ordinary human experience. Nobody wonders why people believe in gravity or the efficacy of mobile phones, since such things are common features of human experience. Yet even spiritualists and psychical researchers,

who claim to have witnessed many psychic phenomena, and orthodox Christians, who believe in the reality of biblical miracles, accept that such things are extraordinary; indeed, that is precisely why they matter to spiritualists, psychical researchers and Christians.

There have long been reports of extraordinary phenomena, but the terms that have been used to describe them have changed. The events in question have been similar in certain respects, yet understood in quite different ways. Continuity can be found in the forms of the phenomena that have been described in various ways. For centuries, things have mysteriously appeared (plagues of locusts, fish and loaves, spirits of the dead), transformed from one thing into another (water into wine, witches into cats, straight spoons into bent spoons), and floated in the air (medieval saints, broomsticks, tables in Victorian drawing rooms). There have always been, or so it has seemed, magical or miraculous cures, exhibitions of clairvoyance, and predictions about the future.

Throughout the last two centuries, both believers and disbelievers have regularly compared earlier magical and miraculous phenomena to the phenomena associated with later psychic and paranormal phenomena. That these various forms of extraordinary phenomena were similar in certain respects has been recognised by every generation, as they have been compared and contrasted by those who have found them similarly real or similarly false, or have discriminated between the real and the false. In doing so, however, the categories used, and the meanings associated with them, have been disputed and changed significantly.

It is in these recognised similarities, disputed differences and various understandings that beliefs about extraordinary phenomena can be understood in a way that gets beyond some of our current assumptions about the paranormal. The term 'paranormal' refers to events that are anomalous in terms of current scientific knowledge. This places paranormal phenomena, by definition, outside of orthodox science. Whether such phenomena are considered normal, or incompatible with current scientific knowledge, depends upon the phenomena in question and the historical context in which they reportedly occur. That this is the case today is not always obvious, since we often miss what we take for granted; hence the need for a historical perspective to remind us that it has always been the case.

In 17th-century Britain, for example, it was normal to believe in miracles, witchcraft, ghosts and other extraordinary phenomena. Beliefs in ghosts had survived the Reformation, when the rejection of Purgatory had made them homeless, but their obvious link to the existence of the soul had made them indispensable. Belief in witchcraft and the occult was equally common, and Christian miracles were taken for granted. Even heroes of the scientific revolution, such as Isaac Newton and Robert Boyle, could study alchemy and investigate second sight, could believe in the miracles of the Bible and the truth of the Genesis story of Creation.

It is easy simply to dismiss such beliefs as the product of a more primitive time, a time when early modern folk were incapable of discriminating between the truth and falsity of magic and miracles, but that is not the case. Most took the miracles of the Bible for granted while rejecting other miracles. Various extraordinary phenomena were disputed, in terms of their reality and their extraordinariness, as part of a developing discourse of facts within natural philosophy. In short, beliefs were evidence-based, but what counted as evidence was based upon different assumptions than at present. Meanwhile, everyone could watch the extraordinary feats of conjurors without mistaking them for feats of witchcraft.

In other words, even the briefest studies of the period reveal that beliefs were based upon particular phenomena (certain miracles, certain extraordinary claims, certain magical feats, but not others), and shaped by a social context that provided a sense of what counted as ordinary (in relation to, for example, contemporary science, religion or entertainment).

When we turn to the early 19th century, we see a different context of plausibility, within which different assumptions and discriminations were made in relation to the extraordinary. Beliefs in witchcraft, once common, were now rare, except in certain rural areas. For the educated, there were already hallucination theories to allow one to believe in ghost experiences, if not in ghosts themselves. Almost everyone still took the miracles of the Bible for granted, though scholars were already questioning the validity of some of them. And when one saw a conjuror performing ostensibly magical feats, it was clearer than ever before that his feats were merely trickery. For the majority of modern people, witchcraft, ghosts and other superstitions were now relegated to the past, and beliefs in them associated with primitive thinking. Meanwhile, the miracles of the Bible could be believed without seeing, and the extraordinary feats of conjurors could be seen without believing.

For all the Victorian talk about the rise of science and rational thinking, new kinds of extraordinary phenomena began to appear. The phenomena associated with mesmerism and spiritualism were observable by anyone who took the time to look, and what became known as 'psychic' and 'paranormal' phenomena are with us still, having been taken seriously by many educated and scientific folk. And, as people have continued

RYAN PIERSE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Witches, like this modern-day practitioner, exist; so is believing in them believing in the paranormal?

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Spiritualism has been seen by historians as a response to doubts about Christian faith in a scientific age – but this tells us little about *what* people believe.

to believe in extraordinary phenomena, even though they are supposed to know better, so historians and psychologists have provided explanations for this.

Historians have tended to understand such beliefs in terms of wider religious, scientific and social concerns. For example, spiritualism has been seen as a response to increasing doubts about Christian faith in the wake of emerging scientific knowledge, and psychical research as a surrogate faith that satisfied spiritual, philosophical and empirical needs. The interests of scientists in such phenomena have been understood in terms of other contemporary scientific discourse and practices, whereby individual scientists regarded such phenomena as compatible with related natural phenomena and, therefore, not so extraordinary after all. More broadly, they have been understood in terms of the radical social and cultural changes that characterised the emergence of modern industrial Britain and as part of broader cultural shifts in how modern people saw themselves and their world.

Understandably, the primary focus of such studies has been on the relationship of interest in such phenomena to various intellectual, social, cultural and scientific topics, from faith and secularism, to class and gender, to literature, technology and expertise. But so far as they have suggested explanations for belief, they have generally done so in terms of individuals' desire to believe, the social function of belief-related practices, and the compatibility of such beliefs with wider cultural views. These are all relevant reasons, of course, but not necessarily the ones of primary importance to those who expressed beliefs about such phenomena. Indeed, when one examines how people expressed their beliefs, one finds that there is an overwhelming stress upon the primacy of the evidence: in short, that less extraordinary explanations were simply inadequate to account for what had been observed.

IT'S POSSIBLE TO CAST SPELLS OR READ MINDS WITH NO PARANORMAL PROCESSES BEING INVOLVED...

For the most part, the matter of evidence has been side-stepped by academic historians. However, if we wish to understand such beliefs, then we need to consider in more detail the views of believers and disbelievers, and that means examining the events about which beliefs have been held, as well as what has been believed about them.

UNDERSTANDING PARANORMAL BELIEFS

Beliefs are generally understood as propositional attitudes. To take a classic example, belief that it is raining is an attitude (belief) towards a proposition (it is raining). People may believe that it is raining, or they may believe that it is not, but nobody talks about belief in rain. 'Belief in' is reserved for things the existence of which is somewhat dubious. People believe in unicorns, but not in horses, they believe in witches, but not in watches. Of course, 'belief in' the existence of something is 'belief that' the thing exists, but some beliefs are less obvious than others. Thus, one might implicitly believe that watches exist without so much as a conscious thought, but belief that witches exist requires (in our time and place) some consideration. As a propositional attitude, belief in the paranormal is the belief that paranormal phenomena exist, this being the proposition ('paranormal phenomena exist') towards which an attitude is taken. An advantage of translating 'belief in the paranormal' to 'belief that paranormal phenomena exist' is that it reminds us that we are talking about beliefs relating to certain phenomena that are classed as paranormal. But it does not get to the heart of the matter unless we consider the phenomena in question, and what is meant by 'paranormal', not only according to psychologists but also to those whose beliefs we seek to understand. After all, if believers do not believe what we think they believe, then we are failing to understand their beliefs.

In psychology, the most commonly used measure of paranormal belief is the Paranormal Belief Scale (PBS); most studies of paranormal belief having been based upon a version of this scale.[2] The PBS asks for responses to statements about such things as the existence of witches, the possibility

of mind-reading and the ability to predict the future with accuracy. To agree with the statement 'Witches do exist', for example, is taken to indicate a belief in witchcraft. This, of course, is a rather clumsy statement, since clearly witches do exist – I have seen them (with my own eyes), and have discussed post-punk goth bands with them – though whether they have any magical powers is, of course, another matter. Similarly, it is possible to read minds, since we can know what others are thinking (we can often tell when others are lying, or fancy us, or want to borrow something). And many people can predict the future accurately (such as weather presenters, economists, or the makers of railway timetables), though (like astrologers and psychics) they are often wrong.

In other words, one can believe in the existence of these things without believing in the paranormal, and the same might be said for the following which, according to the PBS, also indicate belief in the paranormal: black magic (which is practised by real people), life on other planets (in which most scientists now believe), the Abominable Snowman and the Loch Ness Monster (even if one believes that they are, respectively, a form of primate or fish, not so different from currently known creatures). It is also possible to cast spells, as it is to read minds or predict the future, without any paranormal processes being involved. In short, belief in the existence or occurrence of these things is not necessarily belief that they are paranormal. [3]

This is primarily a problem of clarity, but it points to a more fundamental matter. Beliefs in witchcraft, mind-reading, predicting the future, or the existence of cryptozoological beasts are only meaningful for paranormal belief if they refer to things that are not in line with orthodox scientific knowledge. Belief that paranormal phenomena exist is, by definition, belief in phenomena that are outside current scientific knowledge. However, that is not necessarily what it means for those whose beliefs we seek to understand.

After all, there have always been scientists who have claimed that such phenomena are real, and that they are compatible with scientific knowledge. Newton and Boyle believed in miracles, senior figures in the Royal Society since, and even recent Nobel Prize winners, have claimed that such phenomena are real and that they are compatible with scientific knowledge. [4] To take just the most recent example, an internationally respected psychologist recently published, in a major peer-reviewed psychology journal, experimental evidence for the existence of extrasensory perception (ESP), and this has naturally been reported more widely in the popular press. [5] Anyone who has read or heard about this might reasonably believe that ESP is part of current scientific knowledge. From their point of view, belief in such things is not necessarily belief in things that are contrary to scientific knowledge. [6]

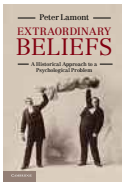
If we are interested in what people believe, rather than simply what they believe *in*, then we need to get into rather more detail. Indeed, even if it is simply belief in the existence or occurrence of things that is of interest, regardless of what is believed about them, this begs the question: belief in what things? When one compares different belief scales, one immediately sees that what counts as paranormal varies radically among them. In this sense, different measures of belief are quite literally measuring belief in different things. [7] But even if we stay with the PBS, and consider only belief in ESP and psychokinesis (PK), we see that the objects of belief are general rather than specific, referring to 'mind-reading' or the 'movement of objects through psychic powers'. So what is the object of belief for the participant (i.e. of what are they thinking when they respond to such statements)?

In responding to a statement about 'mind-reading', for example, one might think of a demonstration like the one we started with. After all, similar demonstrations have been performed live and on television on countless occasions in recent years. If one believes that this is a psychological feat (e.g. that thoughts can be read by reading subtle body language), then presumably one is not, on this basis, a believer in the paranormal. But what if this belief relates to a feat that cannot be done by reading subtle body language? Such a feat is far beyond the limits of such a technique and, if real, would have to count as an example of ESP. People have believed that such events are real, but not that they are paranormal, though experts would say that if they *were* real, then they would be paranormal. So are these people believers in the paranormal or not? The point is that one cannot begin to answer this question without considering what is meant by the terms used to describe such things, and one cannot assume that what they mean to those who hold beliefs is the same as what they mean to those who study them. Without understanding what the relevant terms mean to those whose beliefs we are studying, we cannot understand what they believe. And unless we know what events are the objects of belief, we do not know what they believe in.

In responding to a statement about the 'movement of objects through psychic powers', for example, one might think of when, during a round of golf, one willed the ball to go into the hole, and it did. Or one might think of a stage conjuror levitating an assistant. Or, if one knows anything of the subject at all, one might think of the famous experiments of William Crookes, the first to describe the movement of objects through 'psychic' powers, and which, to date, have never been fully explained. In other words, one might express belief (or disbelief) in the flimsiest or silliest of examples, or in the most carefully examined evidence, and the scale makes no distinction between the two. One might believe (or disbelieve) on the basis of prolonged rational enquiry or else on the basis of total ignorance of the subject, and these will count as identical beliefs.

If we wish to understand extraordinary beliefs, then we need to consider the objects of belief, and what is believed about them, and this means getting into more detail concerning the phenomena about which beliefs are expressed, the causes to which they are attributed, and what the relevant terms mean to those whose beliefs we seek to understand. The good news is that there is already considerable data with which to work, since extraordinary beliefs have been expressed for a very long time. In the process, both believers and disbelievers have explained what they believe, and on what basis. In other words, we can get at the very matters that are currently being missed.

Of course, what people say and what they believe is not necessarily the same thing, and an effective approach to understanding beliefs would allow for a historical enquiry into beliefs about various kinds of extraordinary phenomena at different times and places. It would examine how they were made convincing by those who demonstrated them and those who reported them, how believers and disbelievers constructed and maintained their views, and how beliefs came to be understood by psychologists in the ways that they currently are. FT



This is an edited extract from *Extraordinary Beliefs: A Historical Approach to a Psychological Problem* by Peter Lamont, published by Cambridge University Press, price £18.99.

NOTES

1 This is a personal memory of a performance witnessed in Edinburgh, during the international Edinburgh Festival Fringe, about eight years ago. However, it is fairly typical of a particular effect that has become rather common in the last decade or so.

2 J Tobacyk, 'A revised Paranormal Belief Scale' (unpublished MS, Louisiana Tech University, 1988).

3 The problem has not gone unnoticed, though its significance may have been underestimated.

4 For example: William Crookes, Alfred Russel Wallace or, more recently, Brian Josephson.

5 Bem, DJ (March 2011). "Feeling the Future: Experimental Evidence for Anomalous Retroactive Influences on Cognition and affect", *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 100, 2011, pp407–25. See **FT270:4**; **774:56-58**.

6 Indeed, even if the questionnaire explicitly defined such events as contrary to scientific knowledge, would it then be measuring belief in the paranormal, or faith in scientific authority?

7 This has not gone unnoticed by those who use such questionnaires (e.g.Goulding and Parker, 'Finding psi in the paranormal', p74).

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

PETER LAMONT is a longstanding member of the Koestler Parapsychology Unit, a a former professional magician and an Associate of the Inner Magic Circle. He is currently a Senior Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh and Honorary Secretary of the British Psychological Society.

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The Sikorski mystery

Was the death of General Wladyslaw Sikorski foretold in a mysterious telephone call, or was it just a remarkable coincidence? ANDREW MAY looks back at a very odd case.

ANDREW MAY is a former scientist living in the south-west of England. He has a lifelong interest in forteana, pulp fiction, metaphysics and anything weird.

Many people will be familiar with the name of Charles de Gaulle. He was the strong-willed and charismatic French General who headed up the Free French forces in exile in the UK during World War II. In the decades following the war, de Gaulle became one of the most powerful players on the international stage. Much less well known, however, is the name of General Wladyslaw Sikorski, who was effectively the Polish counterpart of de Gaulle. He was equally strong-willed and charismatic, and was both the Commander-in-Chief of Polish forces and Prime Minister of the Polish government in exile in the UK.

Politically, Sikorski was as much of a thorn in the side of the British government as de Gaulle. When the bodies of 20,000 Polish officers were found massacred in Katyn Forest in April 1943, it was logical, convenient and politically expedient to blame the atrocity on the Germans. After all, the Germans were the enemy, and atrocity was what they did best. But Sikorski rocked the boat by suggesting that the perpetrators might in fact have been the Russians—Britain's second most powerful political allies after the Americans. For some, Sikorski appeared to be biting the hand that fed him. And this may have been the reason (if you're fond of conspiracy theories) that, unlike de Gaulle, Sikorski never lived to become one of the great movers and shakers of the post-War world.

On 24 May 1943, Sikorski embarked on a tour of Polish troops stationed in Palestine and the Lebanon. He travelled with his entourage in converted Liberator bomber AL523, piloted by Czech Flight Lieutenant Edward Prchal.

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: General Sikorski, whose death was erroneously reported – or mysteriously foreseen – in a phone call on 24 May 1943.

The exact conditions of the hoax call were fulfilled

The first leg of the journey took them from RAF Lyneham in Wiltshire to the British base on Gibraltar. The next day they left Gibraltar on the second leg, heading for Cairo. While the Liberator was in the air, a curious incident took place in London. The Polish Minister of Works received a phone call from an anonymous man speaking in good Polish, who gave him a brief and startling message before hanging up: *"General Sikorski's plane has crashed at Gibraltar, and all its passengers have been killed."* Alarmed, the Minister phoned two colleagues – the Deputy Prime Minister and the Deputy Defence Minister – and discovered they had received almost identical messages.

After further frantic phone calls, they discovered the whole think was a hoax. General Sikorski had arrived safe and well in Cairo, and Flight Lieutenant Prchal's Liberator had not crashed in Gibraltar with the loss of all passengers.

Sikorski's tour of the Middle East lasted six weeks, and ended as it had begun in Cairo. On 3 July a transport aircraft arrived to take him back to England. It was Liberator AL523, once again piloted by Flight Lieutenant Prchal. The first leg of the journey was uneventful, and they landed safely at Gibraltar. But 16 seconds after the Liberator took off from Gibraltar on the evening of 4 July, the aircraft crashed into the sea. Everyone on board was killed except Prchal. The exact conditions of the "hoax" telephone call had been fulfilled, six weeks after it was made: *"General Sikorski's plane has crashed at Gibraltar, and all its passengers have been killed."*

With 70 years of hindsight, the cause of the crash that killed General Sikorski is still unknown. The official enquiry found no evidence of sabotage or pilot error, and blamed an unspecified mechanical failure. Or the crash may have been caused by the unusual loading of the plane, or by freak weather conditions, or by a bizarre accident involving a loose mailbag that was believed to have fallen through the nose wheel doors at take-off.

And then of course there are the conspiracy theories. It has been suggested that the Liberator was sabotaged by Nazi agents, who were known to have an active cell on Gibraltar at the time. Or Prchal may have been bribed to crash the plane deliberately; there are odd inconsistencies in his testimony. More outlandishly, it has been suggested that Sikorski was assassinated by the Russians because he was asking awkward questions about Katyn – or even, in the most extreme theories, that he was killed by the British Secret Service for much the same reason. But the blunt truth, as so often with conspiracy theories, is that there isn't a shred of concrete evidence pointing to foul play.

But what about that phone call, made six weeks earlier and uncannily accurate in its details? Was there a secret plot to kill Sikorsky at Gibraltar, which was called off at the last minute on the first attempt but succeeded on the second? Or did a would-be informant overhear a garbled version of the plot, and get the date wrong? Or was it just a bizarre coincidence? If the latter – which of course is the most likely – then it is one of the most remarkable cases of a factually accurate "premonition" in history! FT

Total Recall

When it comes to peering through inanimate matter into the mysteries of the living, breathing cosmos beneath, SD TUCKER finds that *Swann's Way* is not necessarily the only way...

SD TUCKER is a Merseyside-based writer and regular contributor to *FT*. His latest book, *Paranormal Merseyside*, is available now from Amberley Publishing, and his *Terror of the Tokoloshe* is forthcoming from CFZ Press.

This year sees the 100th anniversary of *Swann's Way*, the first volume in one of the least-read great novels of all time, Marcel Proust's *A Remembrance of Things Past* (often now translated, more accurately, as *In Search of Lost Time*). The reluctance of most people to attempt it is understandable, seeing as the seven volumes in the sequence taken together add up to around 3,000-4,000 pages or more, and if the books are now known for anything in the popular mind, it is for the famous 'madeleine' sequence.

This appears in *Swann's Way* itself, and describes the experience of the nameless narrator, an aspiring writer clearly based upon the young Proust himself, who is offered a madeleine – a kind of traditional shell-shaped French sponge cake – to dunk in his tea. Evidently the madeleine in question is tastier than the average Rich Tea biscuit, as it induces in the narrator nothing less than a full-blown, quasi-mystical experience – a "new sensation" that has the effect of filling him with a "precious essence" which "was not in me, it *was* me". Eventually, he realises that the taste of the cake is conjuring up long-forgotten memories of his childhood in the rural town of Combray, where his aunt Léonie used to give him a madeleine soaked in tea every Sunday morning. These recollections appear to have a profound effect.

This idea of memory being suddenly recalled by certain unexpected sights, sounds or other sensations recurs a number of times throughout the work as a whole, and is clearly intended as a metaphor for something greater. By seeing through the surface appearances of things back into the past, the narrator can be seen as somehow conquering time and space itself. By peering through the mere *appearances* of things down to a kind of deeper reality, which seems to lie implicit beneath them, he is essentially engaging in the act of some kind of adept.

Or is this just reading too much into it? Not at all. Proust was highly familiar with the works of the French philosopher Henri Bergson, who, in books like *Matter and Memory*, had been busy promulgating the idea that the Universe itself possesses, in some sense, an element of consciousness, arguing that the world as we see it is not as it truly is. Rather than a solid world of separate items of matter – a narrator, a teacake and a cup, for example – the Universe is, in Bergson's view, in fact a continuous flow of interconnected things and experiences, whose apparent separateness was merely a 'trick of the eye' caused by the inadequacies of human perception. Thus, every element of creation implicitly contained every other element hidden away somewhere inside it. In this sense, the memory of Combray in *Swann's Way* was contained not within the narrator, as such, but actually *within the madeleine itself*. When all the elements combine, they somehow become more than the sum of their separate parts, all sense of separation between them falls away, and the underlying Bergsonian sense of unity underpinning the Universe is revealed in a moment of intense mysticism.

Bergson had some very peculiar ideas about memory, feeling that

The book is now known for Proust's madeleine

BELOW: Marcel Proust, photographed in about 1910.

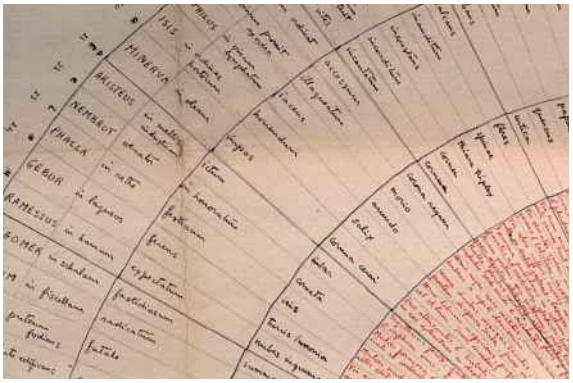
HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

it must have its seat somewhere outside the human brain. As he put it: "Memory must be, in principle, a power absolutely independent of matter [or the organic brain]. If, then, spirit is a reality, it is here, in the phenomena of memory, that we may come into touch with it experimentally." [1] Some of Bergson's ideas had a basis in the findings of organic science, certain of which, he said, supported his view – a position still maintained today in relation to his own theories by another controversial thinker who feels that nature has a memory – Rupert Sheldrake. [2]

Memory, Bergson declared, was nothing less than "the intersection of mind and matter", the place where spirit and corporeality magically combine. [3] We can see echoes of these ideas in Proust's madeleine episode, where the narrator speaks of the tea-soaked cake as being a "potion" full of magic, saying of his memory/epiphany that, while "the truth I am seeking lies not in the cup but in myself", it is still the drink which has "called it into being, but does not know it". Mind and matter are thus here revealed as being merely different aspects of one another – a clear echo of Neoplatonic thought you might not have expected to encounter within a novel published in the early 20th century.

However, the whole madeleine scene also has very definite echoes of some other peculiar occult theories which had been causing a stir during the last 50 or so years of the 19th century. There is a peculiar sense in which Proust's madeleine, like the sponge it was, contained disembodied elements of the past which were simply waiting to be later accessed by the next 'sensitive' (and Proust's narrator certainly *is* sensitive!) to pick it up. A very similar conclusion was drawn by adherents of a bizarre practice which came to be known as 'psychometry'.

This strange pursuit had its origins in the experiments of an American doctor named Joseph Rodes Buchanan who, after meeting a man who claimed that he could 'taste' the presence of brass in the dark when he touched it, decided to see if his medical students could perform similar feats. Apparently they could – and not only this but, supposedly, they could also hold sealed envelopes and 'see' and then describe the persons who had written them and the state of mind they had been in when they had done so. Buchanan named this faculty 'psychometry' (meaning 'soul-measurement'), and published a book about it. However, it



ABOVE: Detail of a reconstruction of Giordano Bruno's 'memory-wheel'.

was one of Buchanan's colleagues, a Professor of Geology from Boston named William Denton, who really ran with the subject.

Denton, who published a book with the suggestive title *The Soul of Things*, seemed to believe that there was some kind of unknown process present within the Universe which somehow acted to record each and every object and event which had ever occurred in all of creation – a similar notion to the so-called 'Akashic Records' of the Theosophists. The Professor came to this conclusion after giving people geological samples to hold, without telling them anything of the rocks' history, and then asking them to give their impressions. Apparently, Denton's subjects were able to report back appropriate intuitions to him – when given volcanic rock to hold, they saw visions of erupting lava flows; meteorites produced images of bright stars and the depths of space; and a fragment of dinosaur bone conjured up pictures of pterodactyl-like creatures on a prehistoric beach. (Less impressively, however, when attempts were made to gain mental pictures of Mars and other planets, images of flying men, four-fingered aliens and giant toadstool-trees full of jelly were dredged up, suggesting that the image-producing parts of the participants' subconscious minds might have had as much to do with all this as did any psychic powers). [4]

I do not know if Proust had any direct knowledge of Denton and Buchanan's studies, but Bergson surely must have done – at one point he was President of the Society for Psychical Research, after all. The ultimate origins of Bergson's – and thus Proust's – occult ideas about memory, however, may well lie further back in time, in the old Renaissance practice of 'memory-magic'. This unusual topic, detailed most famously by the English historian Frances Yates, seems, just like Bergson's philosophies, to have aimed at producing some kind of union between the realms of spirit and of matter. The basic idea was that, by producing a kind of 'memory wheel' of all known subjects and then internalising it, a person trained in the art was able to introduce all the components of the visible and material world of God's creation into the more immaterial world of his mind, thereby producing a sort of magical union between the two. In this way, it was thought, the mind of the mage was able to participate within the mind of God, which also held the knowledge of all creation. Thus, the old Hermetic motto 'As above, so below' became temporarily embodied within the 'little world of man' whenever he made use of this art, ennobling him as something more than mere flesh – and, no doubt, also allowing him to pass all his exams with ease.

The celebrated Italian occultist Giordano Bruno (see **FT277:38-43**) wrote several guides to memory-magic, including *De Umbris Idearum* (The Shadow of Ideas), which provided instructions for building just such a memory-wheel. Essentially, you began by drawing talismanic images of the 36 Egyptian decan demons – 36 gods who were meant to rule over 10-degree divisions of the circle of the zodiac – in a circle. Around these were then placed images of plants, stones and animals – symbols of the natural world ruled over by the celestial powers. Around these were placed images of all known human arts and sciences, symbolised by images of 150 inventors and great men. This whole system combined all that was considered worth knowing within the celestial, natural and human worlds in one, revealing the Universe as a whole to be underpinned by a system of invisible *relations*, a system of relations which, if comprehended within the human mind, essentially allowed the experiencer to become, in a sense, an embodied god. [5]

The revelation of hitherto-hidden relations between the realms of matter and spirit leading on to quasi-mystical experiences, of course, was also what both Bergson and Proust were aiming for in their writings. If William Blake found it possible to find heaven contained within a grain of sand, then it seems that Proust was able to do the same thing with a humble sponge cake and a cup of tea. Sometimes, enlightenment comes when you least expect it. FT

NOTES

1 Henri Bergson quoted in Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, Routledge, 2004, p.718.

2 Rupert Sheldrake, *A New Science of Life*, 2009, Icon Books, p207-208.

3 Bergson quoted in Russell, op. cit, p718.

4 Colin Wilson, *Beyond the Occult*, Watkins Publishing, 2008, pp32, 144-146, 153, 185.

5 Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Routledge, 2002, pp212-219, 360.

What's the Frequency, Victor?

Vic Tandy famously theorised that many hauntings could be explained as the effects of infrasound – but was he right? GORDON RUTTER looks at the latest research in the field.

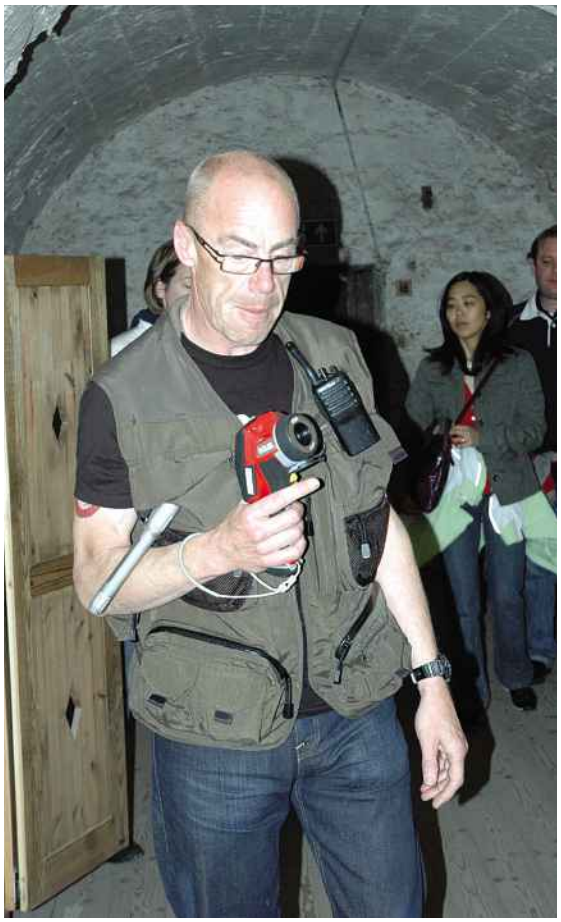
GORDON RUTTER is a lifelong fortean and a regular contributor to *FT*. He started the Edinburgh Fortean Society, which is still going strong, in 1997 and is currently the Chairman of the Charles Fort Institute.

Vic Tandy's identification of infrasound at 19Hz as the cause of many alleged haunting effects is well known to many ghosthunters and forteans – but new research by Steve Parsons, of the investigative group Para. Science, might silence such claims.

Vic Tandy (1955-2005) was working as an engineering designer for a medical equipment company in the 1980s when he had his paranormal Eureka moment. Tandy had heard rumours that the laboratory he worked in was haunted, but he had always put it down to odd noises and vibrations from the various items of equipment that were usually switched on. One morning, on arriving at the lab, he met a very distressed cleaner claiming to have seen "something". Tandy thought it was a case of overactive imagination caused by the movement of vermin or heating or cooling pipes, as at the time none of the machines was actually running. Subsequently, he and his colleagues started to get strong feelings of discomfort and depression. On one particular night when Tandy was working alone, these feelings became very pronounced and he also broke out in a cold sweat. He was convinced there was someone else present – which there wasn't. All machines were checked and found to be fine and Tandy did what anyone else in this situation would do. He went for a coffee.

When he returned to his desk he became aware of a figure at the periphery of his vision. It moved normally, was grey in colour and made no sound. Tandy stated: "It would not be unreasonable to suggest I was terrified". He plucked up the courage to turn and face his tormentor, but on doing so the figure faded and disappeared.

The following day, he arrived early at the lab to do some personal repair work on a fencing foil prior to entering a competition. When he clamped the blade into a vice he found that the free end vibrated frantically up and down. Ever the engineer, he reasoned it must be receiving energy from somewhere, possibly from vibrations in the air: sound, as it is more commonly known. Tandy positioned the blade in various locations to see where the effect was greatest. It was found to be in the exact centre of the room at about desk height. He realised he was experiencing a standing wave of sound and he was able to work out its frequency: 18.98 Hz. Further research (switching things off and on) showed that the standing wave was produced by a fan in the extraction system.



BOTH PHOTOS: GORDON RUTTER

Tandy found a reference in a book (Tempest's *Infrasound and Low Frequency Vibration*) about the effects of low frequency sound: less than 20 Hz is generally inaudible to human hearing and is called infrasound. These effects included feelings of fear, sweating and shivering and even a 'smearing' of vision. He reasoned that he had found the cause, and a modification to the mounting of the extractor fan caused both standing wave and "ghost" to disappear.

Tandy did further research, reinforcing his theory, and he also found a similar standing wave in a number of reportedly haunted locations. And that was that. Infrasound of 19Hz causes symptoms which can lead to reports of hauntings.

Which brings us back to Steve Parsons. Parsons is the founder of Para. Science, an organisation started in 1993 "to conduct serious study, research and investigation into all types of paranormal phenomena". To start with, Parsons had noticed that even prior to Tandy's work there had been a lot of claims made about infrasound (ranging from brain tumours, cot deaths and building demolition from five miles/8km away) and that many of these claims remained unsubstantiated; those that have been tested generally remain less than proven. Nevertheless, infrasound is often cited as a cause of hauntings and many other phenomena (*Most Haunted* anyone?). Parsons quotes one (unnamed) paranormal group as stating that "infrasound is caused by ghosts and spirits as they use electromagnetic

energy to move things or materialise, just as lightning which is moving energy creates thunder which is infrasound, this can be recorded & used to prove that spirits are present".

As Parsons summatised: "There seems to be a generally poor understanding of the original work by Tandy, and of technical constraints in making infrasound measurements, and this has led to misunderstanding of any actual relationship between infrasound and paranormal experiences and accounts". To remedy this situation, Parsons set out to examine the effects of infrasound, and his research was published in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* in late 2012.

Sound is a form of energy travelling as waves propagated through the air (as well as other materials); when this energy hits our ears, we perceive it as sound. For a human with normal hearing, the range of sound detectable is from 20 Hz to 20 000 Hz (although as age increases, the top end falls off). The loudness of sound (the amount of energy present) is measured in decibels (a logarithmic scale) and sound can be affected by objects in the vicinity.

Infrasound (sound of a frequency less than 20 Hz) can sometimes be detected by humans, but more as a feeling than as sound, such as a shaking of the body or the internal organs. Because of the wavelength of infrasound (a frequency of 20Hz has a wavelength of 17.1m/56ft), one of 15 Hz has 23m/75ft) infrasound often defracts (bends) around objects rather than being reflected (for reflection, the wavelength needs to be smaller than the object it is hitting). This gives it properties very different from those we are used to with audible sound.

Infrasound can be generated by anything that produces vibrations, such as machinery (the fan in Tandy's laboratory) or the weather. As a result of complex interactions with the environment, a difference of a few inches distance can make a huge difference in exposure to infrasound. We are normally quite good at detecting where sound is coming from, but again due to the differences between audible and infrasound frequencies we generally haven't a clue as to the source of infrasound – our bodies aren't made to detect it.

Parsons has scoured the literature and found that exposure to infrasound has very variable effects on individuals. These effects can include nausea, apathy, changes to heart and breathing rate, changes to blood pressure, and apprehension and visual effects. Using

GORDON RUTTER

The effects included fear, sweating and shivering

(initially) a modified loudspeaker as a microphone (true infrasound microphones are prohibitively expensive) and then a pair of air pressure transducers, Parsons has produced a reliable and cost-effective infrasound detector.

He has a problem with the method Tandy used to calculate (not measure) the frequency of the standing wave in his laboratory. This was based on the length of the room and the position found where the infrasound had the greatest effect. Parsons argues that the height and width of the room need to be taken into account as well, not just the length. Using guestimates, he has produced figures that give seven different standing waves in the central location of the room, from 18.8 Hz to 75.9 Hz.

Attempts to produce haunting symptoms using infrasound at 19Hz in Edinburgh (the Real Mary Kings Close) and 17 Hz in London (Purcell Room Concert) failed to replicate visual hallucinations or apparitional experiences, although both experiments reported feelings of unease. Replicating Tandy's infrasound measurements at a supposedly haunted cellar in Coventry, Parsons found a broad range of wavelengths from 2 Hz to 20 Hz with a peak at 5.7 Hz. Tandy also reported that he gained his measurements over several 20-second periods, whereas the accepted form of measurement is to use a longer period, such as 20 minutes, to remove the effects of short-lived events, such as a bus driving past (although such effects could, perhaps, be responsible for a brief chill during an investigation). In addition, Tandy's measurements were taken when the cellar was empty, whereas (of course) people were present when ghostly feelings were reported. Parsons's data suggests an increase in the volume of infrasound of between 15 and 30 decibels when people are present.

Looking at his data, and that from several other studies, Parsons concluded that infrasound at 19 Hz is *not* the ghost inducer we had been led to believe. Infrasound is around us all the time, and whilst it may well be a factor in leading us to believe a location is haunted, it is not the overriding one and by itself it does not produce such an effect.

Parsons feels that the data suggest that interacting frequencies, ideally rapidly varying over a small range, are more likely to be responsible for the spookiness of haunted locations. So, should we now throw out Tandy's work as fatally flawed? No, most definitely not. Without Tandy pioneering the linking of hauntings and infrasound it's unlikely other researchers would have investigated the subject so extensively. Tandy put forward a hypothesis and collected data that seemed to support it and now subsequent research is modifying that original hypothesis – and that, after all, is exactly how science works. FT

ABOVE: An infrasound monitor and tone generator.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Steve Parsons investigating at the Real Mary King's Close, Edinburgh.

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W Tempest, (Ed.) *Infrasound and Low Frequency Vibration*, Academic Press, London,1976.

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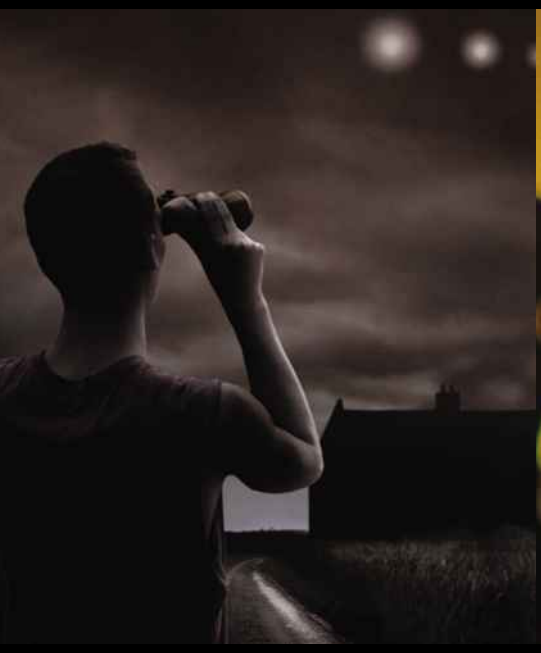

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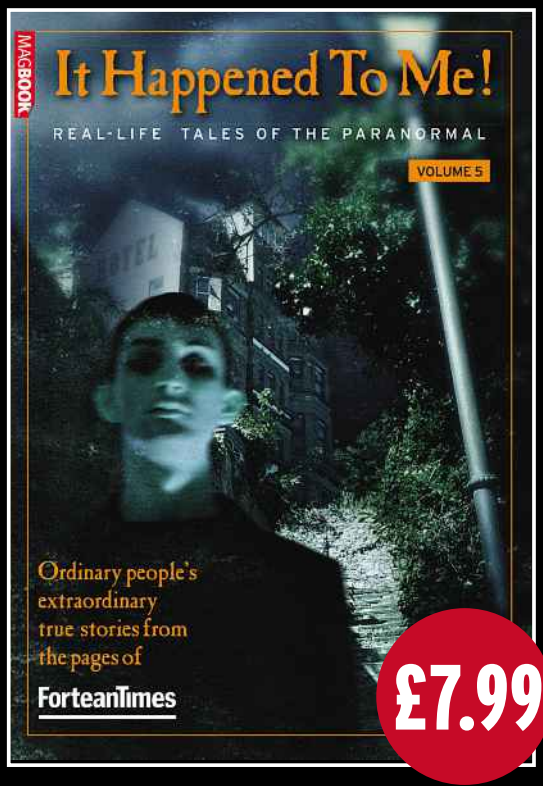

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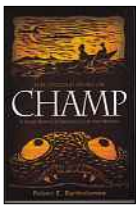
An exhaustive social history of the unexplained phenomena of Lake Champlain could be said to demonstrate that the truth should not get in the way of a good story



The Untold Story of Champ

Robert E Bartholomew

Excelsior Editions 2012

Pb, 253pp, illus, notes, ind, $24.95, ISBN 9781438444840

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.75

The chief value of this addition to the groaning shelf of books on water-monsters is that it is not by a cryptozoologist. Robert Bartholomew is a well-known social historian of anomalous phenomena with such acclaimed studies under his belt as *The Martians have Landed! A History of Media-Driven Panics and Hoaxes* (with Benjamin Radford); *Hoaxes, Myths and Manias: Why We Need Critical Thinking*; *Exotic Deviance: Medicalizing Cultural Idioms From Strangeness to Illness*; and *Outbreak! The Encyclopedia of Extraordinary Social Behaviour* (with Hilary Evans). Where Michel Meurger's ground-breaking study of monsters in Canadian lakes – *Lake Monster Traditions* (1982/1988) – deconstructed the phenomena into its mythological and folkloric components, Bartholomew here focuses upon the social history and social psychology of a single lake straddling the US–Canadian border, the majority of its body being in New York State.

Those of us not American or Canadian have little conception of the place Champ – the monster of Lake Champlain – has in North American hearts and culture. It was a ubiquitous reference in newspapers and everyday life long before Nessie raised her head in Scottish waters. Today cartoons, plush toys, advertisements, signs, business names, and tourist lures all exploit the Champ legend. Certainly, to judge by the amount of news coverage of sightings or near-sightings of 'something' in the lake, there are sufficient testimonials and reports to underpin the widespread belief that the denizen is an actual creature. Even if no one can agree on what it is, the most common representation is some kind of humped saurian with a horse-like head on a long snaking neck.

Today's Champ phenomenon is very like that of Nessie. Bartholomew's central chapters go into considerable detail – much of it from local newspapers – about Champ sightings, the earliest being well over a century before Nessie became the world's most famous water monster in the 1930s. One of the earliest detailed reports appeared on 24 July 1819, from a Captain Crum who had sailed out of Port Henry, New York State, two days earlier. In the early morning light he spotted "unusual undulations" around 200 yards (180m) away; then the monster reared its head 15ft (4.6m) out of the water and sped to the south, apparently chased by two large sturgeon and a Bill-fish. Crum described it as 187ft (57m) long with a flat head "similar to a sea-horse", large eyes and three large, projecting teeth, with "hunches on the back as large as a [..] barrel" and black in colour with a red band around its long neck.

Bartholomew cites nautical historian Phil Reines to the effect that marine captains of the day were given considerable credibility, mainly due to the number of them attesting to sea serpent encounters backed by affidavits from other officers and crew; consequently, "no responsible sea-going nation doubted the existence of the Sea Serpent". Coming just two years after the sightings off Gloucester, Massachusetts, the existence of a monster in a large inland lake seemed almost inevitable.

> **After the sightings, "the existence of a monster in a large inland lake seemed almost inevitable"**

Champ-lore took off in 1843 when the Chambly Canal opened, allowing boats to navigate from the mighty St Lawrence River to the northern end of Champlain. By 1886, small ships (along with new roads and railways) were bringing 100,000 visitors to the area; tourism made ready use of the extraordinary 1873 flap of sightings at Whitehall and Dresden, NY. Regular observations of Champ on land and cruising at speed across the lake featured in the national press, causing PT Barnum to offer $50,000 for the monster's carcase. From then on, sightings became intermittent, sometimes many years apart, until Champ's fame was eclipsed in 1933 by the new sensation of Nessie.

A resurgence came in the 1970s, with a new generation of Champ-hunters and cryptozoologists. It was not until the notorious photo, taken in July 1977 by Sandra Mansi, that serious divisions of opinion opened up among the monster's pursuers. Despite considerable effort to identify the location of the shot, and the morphology of the supposed creature, no verification followed. Mansi's photo still looks to me like a half-submerged swimmer in mid-crawl, but what do I know?

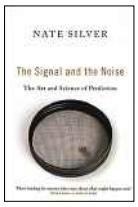
Bartholomew is especially good here, following each sighting and the disputes they triggered, the effects of publicity on the witnesses, the first excitements, the journalistic hyperbole, the fallings-out, the investigations and expert analyses, the egos and the entrenchment of cherished views... and the inevitable dismay and disillusionment when no unambiguous evidence of a large creature emerged. It's all here in considerable detail.

Just as valuable – and for us forteans, perhaps more telling – is Bartholomew's clear exposition of the origin of the Champ myth. The 'first sighting' is usually attributed by modern writers to the eponymous French cartographer Samuel de Champlain who explored the St Lawrence between 1604 and 1610. Diligent detective work traces the first appearance of this attribution to an article in *Vermont Life* in 1970 by Marjorie Porter. Meurger was not the first to point out that Champlain's log describes nothing of the sort, but his focused appendix (in *Lake Monster Traditions*) placed the facts of the matter squarely in the fortean/cryptozoology arena. What Champlain observed was a 5ft (1.5m) specimen of a long-snouted, heavily armoured

Continued on page 60

Predictable...

We must recognise limits to knowability – over-confidence can really trip you up



The Signal and the Noise

The Art and Science of Prediction

Nate Silver

Allan Lane 2012
Hb, 534pp, figs, notes, ind, £25.00, ISBN 9781846147524
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £20.00

"When we are making predictions, we need a balance between curiosity and scepticism," says political oracle/celebrity statistician Nate Silver. This statement is surprisingly fortean, but it shouldn't be: a central theme to Silver's wide-ranging, somewhat overstuffed, yet ultimately instructive investigation of how forecasting works (or doesn't) is that soothsaying often come with a detrimental degree of over-confidence.

Silver is no techno-utopian. Yes, he crunches data to determine political contests. However, human evaluation and reasoning are critical steps in the process. This is because the collection and manipulation of probabilistic data involves information that is pertinent (the signal) and information that is misleading (the noise). The former must be extracted from the latter to achieve accuracy. From economics to epidemiology to meteorology, Silver analyses predictive practices across an array of fields and subjects. In some cases, such as the Great Recession, he engages in a post mortem of sorts to pinpoint where and how prediction led to perdition.

Some subjects are more predictable than others. Sports, which are governed by rules and have terabytes of statistics, are easier to predict than, say, earthquakes, which are produced by geological laws that are still not fully understood.

The book's more interesting chapters involve the intersection of games, technology and predictability, be it on baseball statistics, the dynamics of Internet poker, profiles of multimillionaire sports bettors, or Kasparov's showdown with Deep Blue.

Silver is best when drawing on personal experience. He made bundles playing Internet poker and later developed a successful baseball statistics system. It is through these that his methodologies are best explained. In messier fields that feature complexity and challenging measurability, Silver's focus is not on how to make perfect calls. How could it be? Instead, there is a re-emphasis on the limits of knowablity and warnings against tech-driven overconfidence. Silver highlights subtle yet important distinctions between statistical buzzwords like prediction and forecast, accuracy and precision, uncertainty and risk, and correlation and causation. There's also plenty of dragging and slogging amidst the insights. By the later chapters, Silver's approach to his material has become a bit, um, predictable: start with a real world example, look at why a prediction did or didn't work, interview a few experts, and champion a rational way to combine computing power and human interpretation. At 500 pages, some noise could have been left out without impacting the signal. Still, this is a truly insightful survey of the thrilling possibilities and numerous risks to be found in Big Data-era predictive undertakings.

Mike Pursley

Fortean Times Verdict
PREDICTIVE GOLD FROM SILVER, BUT SOME PANNING IS REQUIRED **7**

Continued from page 59

garpike, known to natives as a *chaousarou* – not the 10ft (3m) "serpent-like creature" that for some reason Porter invented and which is celebrated on a public signboard outside Port Henry.

But, despite the quiet refutations by historians and careful researchers, the pike was out of the trap and swelling towards monsterhood. Along the way, in Bartholomew's chronicle, we also discover the serious doubts about Captain Crum's unfeasibly detailed description. Unfortunately, Crum may be a myth himself, as his account was signed 'Horse Mackerel'. Far older legends of the horse-headed long-neck can be found among a great many of the lakes and rivers that flow into the St Lawrence, so it is feasible that Crum (or his writer) would have known of the type long before he claimed to have seen it in Lake Champlain. Is Champ a classic example of truth not getting in the way of a good story? If so, what are we to make of the many plausible sightings by apparently rational and credible witnesses? Actual or not, Champ occupied a very real place in the social history of the region and in the imagination of millions.

This is a first-class exercise in unravelling the ontology at the heart of much forteana and, with Bartholomew's clarity, focus and critical apparatus, deserves to be studied by all forteans and cryptozoologists.

For more on Champ, see **FT34:10, 44:72, 176:26, 182:44–48, 184:75, 185:76, 189:69, 192:73, 253:5, 271:21.**

Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict
A FIRST-CLASS UNRAVELLING OF A CLASSIC FORTEAN TROPE **9**

Between Mind and Nature

A History of Psychology

Roger Smith

Reaktion Books 2013
Hb, 304pp, ind, £25.00, ISBN 9781780230986
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £22.50

Typically, a chronicle of the science of psychology will draw the reader a straight line from the humoural medicine of ancient Greece to the modern, shiny university laboratory – and call that "history". Roger Smith takes a wider view, arguing that such annals of the discipline's past create a convenient line of best-fit through a very human mess of plot points. Everything not on the line constitutes what Fort would have called "damned" data and a story (though not suppressed) rarely told.

Within the pages of *Between Mind and Nature* we hear of divisions and in-fighting, lies, pretence and fudged data. In Freud, we see a man with all the self-publicising showmanship and possessive insecurities of a cult leader; also how the pioneer of behaviourism, John Broadus Watson, used his reductionist theories of stimulus and response to explain away his extramarital affair to his wife. This is not presented as grubby gossip, but as a history of people making a science about people; it was never going to be that tidy straight line espoused by first-year textbooks.

We get a sense of psychology scrabbling for a cohesive identity like an awkward teenager; attempting to hide the ethereal and amorphous nature of its subject matter with the appropriated styles of rigorous science. So, the good old-fashioned soul is rebranded as "the rational soul" for the age of enlightenment before finally becoming the mind – and *The Asylum Journal* creeps toward being *The British Journal of Psychiatry*.

The author's historic overview gives the reader an insight into the way in which psychology works. A discovery in physics, for example, can be seen as being just that – a revelation of a truth that has always been, regardless of the discoverer's current location in time or place. Psychology appears to be more a science of invention. What it looks for is what it finds; and what it looks for dependent on the times in which it looks. Politics shapes society and society shapes psychology. So after World War II, psychologists, shocked by recent horrors, looked for authoritarianism and obedience. In Stalin's Russia, the only

permitted psychology became the Russian mechanistic theories that derived from Pavlov. Extreme examples, but what does our current infatuation with evolutionary psychology – that safe harbour for sceptics – tell us about our own times?

Another point of interest to *FT* readers will be the handling of parapsychology: a topic largely avoided by serious writers. That clanking skeleton comes out of the closet for a welcome leg-stretch here. The author points out that phrenology (the now discredited study of bumps on the head to reveal personality) prepared the way for a science of quantifying behaviour.

We learn that William James, the first great American psychologist, worked with mediums and was first president of the American Society for Psychical Research. The author also rather elegantly points out a paradox within parapsychology: that as long as research into psychic phenomena is laboratory-based and Occam's Razor is employed, the supernatural cannot ever really be proved, because – as the supernatural is yet to be proved – hoaxing will always be the "simplest" explanation of any observed effects.

He concludes this insightful chapter by suggesting that we might do better to look for results from other countries such as Brazil or Mongolia, where belief in the paranormal is more embedded – if, indeed, there are results to be found.

Between Mind and Nature has clarity and a dry sparkle of humour. Smith's rattling pace makes up for the sometimes dry subject matter and it consistently raises questions and invites discussion.

It is the same story that any psychology student has heard before, with the same cast of characters and same scenery, but rendered a more interesting and vital drama by inclusion of all the meanderings and dead ends other histories choose to omit.

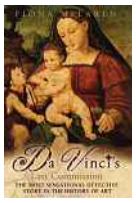
Mark Norton

Fortean Times Verdict

PAST-LIFE REGRESSION THERAPY FOR A SCHIZOPHRENIC SCIENCE **9**

Getting it very wrong

A mess of sloppy research, groundless assertions and dubious rehashed arguments – and even the boo-boos are borrowed…



Da Vinci's Last Commission

The Most Sensational Detective Story in the History of Art

Fiona McLaren

Mainstream Publishing 2012
Hb, 320pp, illus, bib, ind, £17.99, ISBN 9781780571133

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.99

In the 1960s a grateful patient gave his doctor a painting of the Madonna and Child with John the Baptist. Years later, the doctor's daughter starts investigating the painting and comes to a number of conclusions. First, it's probably by Leonardo da Vinci. Second, it's the last painting he did, commissioned by King Francis I of France. Third, it's not actually of the Virgin Mary, but of Mary Magdalene, and it reveals heretical beliefs: Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene; they had children; he survived the crucifixion and they headed off to France to raise their family, the "royal bloodline".

The more I read of Fiona McLaren's book, the more I despaired. She regurgitates ideas promulgated by a range of alternative historians and amateur theologians without ever seeming to pause to ask: is there any historical evidence for them? Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, Laurence Gardner, Margaret Starbird, Dan Brown, they're all in here. She seems to have no critical sense at all, taking stories in the *Golden Legend* literally, and citing not only the British-Israelite and Jesus-in-Britain writers Isabel Hill Elder and E Raymond Capt, both beloved of the white supremacist Christian Identity movement, but even the arch-conspiracist and Fascist Nesta Webster.

As well as the inevitable Sacred Feminine she muddles the Culdees and the Cathars into the mix – along with the Knights Templar, Rosslyn Chapel, the Priory of Sion ("the protectors of that line") and the Freemasons ("part of that same conspiracy" to cover up the hidden truth).

Almost everything in the book is borrowed – including the mistakes. Her sloppy research includes the Friday the 13th superstition coming from the arrest of the Knights Templar on Friday 13 October 1307; it didn't. Nor were the Knights Templar "known to have worshipped a beautiful gilded head of a woman". Nor are the Druids known to have had any connection with "standing stones and circles", at least, not in any real scholarship. Nor did the Freemasons emerge from the Druids and Culdees. Nor is it the case that "the brotherhood of Freemasonry and the Knights Templar are practically interchangeable". She states: "Huge portions of the Bible were, we know, omitted by the Roman Emperor Constantine in AD 325 at the Council of Nicaea." Wrong. And Bernard of Clairvaux was not the founder of the Cistercians. All simple factual errors, easily checkable. She does the alternative historian trick of criticising scholars who fail to see what is so clear to her – "experts have their own speciality and tend not to leave the perimeters of that expertise" – while describing herself as "an independent scholar", which seems to mean not having to depend on awkward stuff like evidence. "What a frustration it is to have to point out the obvious to historians...," she writes in all modesty.

And so Leonardo designed "the double helix staircase that would inspire those of Chambord and Blois. The double helix which represents the then supposedly unknown structure of our genetic DNA." Right. And: "Why is Christ generally portrayed as having blond hair when it was well documented that he was dark?" Really? A source would be useful. Near the end of the book she gives us "my final vision... A leap of faith, to take you to the other side of knowing." John's Gospel, she tells us, was written by Mary Magdalene.

It's common for an author's enthusiasm for her subject to overtake critical objectivity – but that's (partly) what editors are for. Fiona McLaren's unscholarly quest for hidden truth is perhaps understandable; but there is no excuse for a respectable publisher to push out this rehash of other people's speculations in religious history – especially with such a silly sub-title. As for the painting which sparked off this book, and brought it masses of free publicity in the media (Ms McLaren used to work in marketing, and has clearly not forgotten her trade), the kindest one can say is "case unproven". If it really is a Leonardo, the tabloids screamed, it could be worth £100 million. In the meantime the author will have to make do with her royalties.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

NICE PICTURES BUT TOO MUCH SPECULATION, TOO MANY ERRORS **2**

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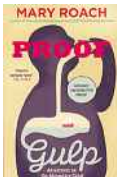
Gut instincts

Grimly gripping poke around the digestive system illuminates Elvis's passing



Gulp

Adventures on the Alimentary Canal

Mary Roach

Oneworld 2013

Pb, 338pp, bib, £11.99, ISBN 9781851689934

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £10.79

When it comes to science writing, there are few authors whose books I look forward to more than Mary Roach. She has a very specific approach: she takes an area of science that interests her (in previous books this has included sex, death and space travel), hones in on the quirky and mildly gross aspects of it and investigates with gleeful curiosity. While that might suggest triviality, Roach puts in the spadework; she reads the papers, visits the labs, meets the scientists and asks them peculiar questions. She's enormously good at conveying her amused drive for knowledge, writing the book as a first person narrative, complete with footnotes that often gently boggle at some piece of choice weirdness.

With *Gulp* she turns her attention to the digestive system, following its path more or less directly from mouth to anus, but with plenty of meanders and detours. As well as exploring what exactly cats like to eat, how modern digestive science began with a trapper who had a permanent hole in his stomach, and whether it is possible to eat via the anus (bringing to mind Ken Campbell's London Gastromancer and his 'beef tea blowback'), much of what she covers will bring joy to anyone of fortean sensibilities. There is much discussion of whether you can suffocate on your own farts – it turns out that you can't, but the reason whole groups of people frequently die after serially descending into cesspits to rescue their predecessors is that in those circumstances hydrogen sulphide (the 'bad egg' element of fart gas) reaches concentrations that first knock out your sense of smell then paralyse your respiratory system so you suffocate. Bosom serpents also get a look in, with our own Jan Bondeson being name checked for his work in this area. Roach, with her usual thoroughness, goes further though, and digs out the research papers on creatures living in people's guts, discovering that slugs dissolve, frogs fare little better, and in the case of a human swallowed by a whale, the contractions of the stomach muscles would crush them if they didn't suffocate first. Linked to this is consideration of whether swallowed creatures could eat their way out, taking in burst snakes and some startling experiments with frogs, mealworms and endoscopes, plus a novel explanation for where humans could have got the idea that dragons breathe fire. Dull it is not.

I have to say, though, that her thesis that Elvis died from constipation is her pièce de résistance. I now know way more than I ever thought I needed to about Elvis's colon, its behaviour, what exactly 'manually disimpact' means and how this might account for his closeness to his mother. Roach's skill is to draw you into things like this, keep you reading and at the end leave you wondering how you have ever lived without this information. *Gulp* is an unalloyed pleasure, and despite reading this in February, I am confident this will be one of my favourite books of 2013.

Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict

THE JOY OF PERISTALSIS, AND A LOT MORE BESIDES **9**

Interpreting the English Village

Landscape and Community at Shapwick, Somerset

Mick Aston & Chris Gerrard

Windgather Press 2013

Pb, 456pp, illus, notes, bib, £29.95, ISBN 9781905119455

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £29.95

Shapwick is an unremarkable village on the Somerset Levels, midway between Glastonbury and Bridgwater. Its very ordinariness is one reason it was chosen, from 10,000 parishes in England, as the subject of a comprehensive study into "the experience of an English village community over the past 1000 years".

The Shapwick Project began in 1988 with the launch of a 10-year investigation into the evolution of settlement and landscape; writing it up took another decade and the work continues. A monograph was published in 2007; this volume is aimed at a wider readership. Well-written, detailed and beautifully illustrated throughout, it should appeal to anyone interested in the British landscape and its history.

Mick Aston and illustrator Victor Ambrus are well-known to viewers of *Time Team*, as are the many techniques used by the project.

Every effort was made to involve the local community in activities such as field walking, which over a decade produced 96,452 items from ichthyosaur bones to tractor parts. There were no large-scale excavations, only 'test-pitting', which again was done by local volunteers. Village houses were studied and surveyed; traces of earlier habitation were detected by aerial photography and 'geofizz'. Locals surveyed the woods and hedgerows, as well as their own gardens; boreholes produced evidence of occupation by hunter-gatherers in the Early Mesolithic, up to 12,000 years ago.

Fascinating, compelling and never patronising, this magnificent book is popular archæology at its absolute best. I cannot recommend it too highly.

Steve Marshall

Fortean Times Verdict

POPULAR ARCHÆOLOGY AS IT SHOULD BE DONE – STUNNING **10**

The Urban Circus

Travels with Mexico's Malabaristas

Catriona Rainsford

Bradt Travel Guides 2013

Pb, 286pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781841624440

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKCLUB PRICE £8.99

Malabarista is generally translated as 'juggler', but there is a darker undertone; it also means trickster, manipulator of people. Catriona Rainsford met a group of *malabaristas* in Chihuahua: Trico, the leader, was a unicyclist and juggler with an occasional violent *alter ego*, Psychotrico; juggler Sandra was fleeing Ciudad Juárez, known by academics for its "systemic sexual feminicide"; indeed, the whole group were fleeing Mexico's corruption and violence in one way or another. Juggling, formerly the preserve of shamans, who used it to convince others of their supernatural powers, was a metaphor for their own lives, to which it gave a quasi-mystical importance.

This group of funambulists operate in a no-man's land between a modern Mexican society, one traumatised by narcos and murder, and a more primitive one. She encounters the vestiges of rituals and legends from pre-Hispanic culture which have been appropriated into a very Mexican (and peyote-tinged) version of New Age philosophy, and the Huichol people, who have resisted this appropriation and any European influence.

In Wirikuta, she watches strange lights in the sky ("naves espaciales,"explains Trico) and is told Aztec legends of the Moon.

Rainsford writes like an angel and there are lovely touches throughout the book: to the irritation of the Catholic Church, Saint Jude is regarded as the patron saint of narcos and criminals. The Mexico City authorities removed a section of a metro station floor when worship of a BVM-shaped stain disrupted commuting. She didn't make me want to visit Mexico, though.

Val Stevenson

Fortean Times Verdict

BEAUTIFULLY WRITTEN ACCOUNT OF A TRAUMATISED COUNTRY **9**

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a small selection of the dozens of books that have arrived at Fortean Towers in recent months...

The 100 Best British Ghost Stories

Gillian Bennett

Amberley Publishing 2012

Pb, 192pp, illus, refs, £14.99, ISBN 9781445606941

Folklorist Gillian Bennett is no stranger to forteans; her book *Urban Legends* is a classic. This selection of tales of "ghosts, poltergeists, boggarts and black dogs" spanning four centuries is drawn from her own collection of British oral traditions and deserves equal recognition. Rather than grouping by county, Bennett presents them chronologically so we may observe "the way ghost-lore changes over time". It's another gem from that star of local history publishing, Amberley.

Breaking the Mirror of Heaven

Robert Bauval & Ahmed Osman

Bear & Co 2012

Pb, 359pp, illus, plates, notes, bib, ind, £16.99, ISBN 9781591431565

The authors, both born in Egypt, acknowledge its place in the history of civilisation, science, religion and magic, then discuss the greater legacy of how she has been imagined from the time of Plato and Alexander to Napoleon and modern archæologists. Against this glorious backdrop, there were centuries of pillaging and destruction, of which the burning of the Library at Alexandria is a famous example. The authors then examine the worldwide interest in things Egyptian during the Napoleonic period, especially the re-booting of Freemasonry in French-occupied Egypt. Since that time, they argue, foreign rulers – Arabic and European – have sought to "cleanse Egypt of its 'pagan' past" by the covert "suppression of ancient knowledge".

They then focus on Zahi Hawass, the head of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), accusing him of betraying the heritage he was so vocal in promoting. Having been groomed originally by Fox TV and Rupert Murdoch, it seems Hawass grew to believe his own publicity, by turns "charismatic and passionate" and a vindictive "bullying megalomaniac". Since he was nearly lynched by his SCA in the recent Tahrir Square uprising, Hawass is awaiting trial for theft of antiquities, misappropriating funds, corruption and mismanagement. Despite being on the receiving end of his anger, the authors take no joy in his plight; their message is the precarious fate of the cultural treasures of the land called, in ancient histories, "The Mirror of Heaven".

Real Ghosts, Restless Spirits, and Haunted Places

Brad Steiger

Visible Ink Press 2012

Pb, 678pp, appx, ind, $24.95, ISBN 9781578594016

This heavy paperback is Steiger's expanded revision of the already huge edition of 2003. His 50 years' experience of authoring books on strange phenomena bring considerable balance to these pages but it is with his family's direct encounters with ghostly phenomena when they moved to a new house in 1973 that opens this encyclopedia. In 29 chapters, covering a comprehensive range of haunted people, places, things and entities, he provides what is probably the most extensive introduction to the genre. There is so much here that even veteran pursuers of ghosts (whether by reading or investigating) are bound to find something new.

UFOs Above the Law

Frank Soriano & James Bouck

Schiffer Publishing 2011

Pb, 91pp, ind, notes, £10.50, ISBN 9780764339202

The underlying theme of this anthology of UFO-related reports is that they have been made by law enforcement officers and other government officials. Massed like this, they are impressive, well marshalled and presented with authoritative detail. The authors argue that these officials – including police officers, wardens, rangers and members of the military – satisfy the public need for "credible witnesses" who keep calm during their experience and report it rationally, as though this makes them more trustworthy. But it is the person that experiences the event, not the office. Often the reality is that these folk were not appointed officially to 'go and experience' UFO contact; it was not part of their job. When it happens to them, it happens, as it does to anyone else, suddenly, intrusively personal and often deeply disturbing. They then agonise over reporting it knowing that they will have to endure unwelcome investigation and pressure from both the public and their superiors. The personal struggle to adjust to the seemingly impossible or totally unexpected event is of greater interest than the details of UFOs which, for all the witnesses' sincerity, might have been the result of misunderstanding and misidentification. But what if there were, indeed, some corroborative evidence... What then?

FORTEAN FICTION

The Devil's Looking Glass

Mark Chadbourn

Bantam Press 2013

Pb, 384pp, £12.99, ISBN 9780593062494

In the third volume in Mark Chadbourn's *Sword of Albion* trilogy, swordsman, rake, adventurer and England's greatest spy Will Swyfte cuts a swathe through a re-imagined Elizabethan Age in which the Færie Queen and her Unseelie Court threaten to overwhelm all that is sacred in the realm of Queen Elizabeth I. The looking glass of the title belongs to Dr John Dee, whose alchemical efforts have kept the Unseelie Court at bay. But his mystical obsidian mirror, in the wrong hands, might set the world itself on fire. Dee has been abducted and spirited away to the New World, while a frozen London remains under siege from supernatural powers. The race is on for Will, who must set off to rescue Dee from the terrifying fortress home of the Unseelie Court before he can save this green and pleasant land.

With an impressive track record in weaving together the history, folklore and mythology of the British Isle in his previous series, Chadbourn displays an impressive facility in mixing the dark supernatural elements with the tangible, everyday dirt and grime of the city streets of England circa 1593. This world is populated by a colourful cast, historical and imagined. The Fay are depicted as more than mere supernatural ciphers; characters such as Deortha and Mandraxas are as vivid on their own terms as Captain Bloody Jack Courtney and Irish spy Red Meg O'Shee, who travels with Will after unsuccessfully whisking Dee off herself to purge an enchanted Ireland. Let's just say Will and Meg have previous. Running through it all is Will's tormented search for his lost love Jenny, stolen away from him by the Fay. Fans of the first two volumes will be more than satisfied by this third offering, which rattles along at a rollicking pace and is packed with incident. It's all decorated with the broad brush with which Mark Chadbourn paints the rough, rotten taverns and streets of London and Liverpool with much picaresque relish, and he depicts the shifting beauties and horrors of the Unseelie Court in the New World as deftly with his pen as Will Swyfte handles a sword.

Nick Cirkovic

SEND REVIEW COPIES OF DVDS, BLU-RAYS AND GAMES TO:
FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD.

Utopia: Series One

Dir various, UK 2013

4DVD, £19.99 (DVD) / £24.99 (Blu-Ray)

Utopia brought quite a few complaints to Channel 4 when it aired earlier this year for its graphic violence and for violence involving schoolchildren; it was screened only a few weeks after yet another American school shooting.

The six-part series *is* violent, but this is integral to Dennis Kelly's story, emphasising the dehumanising and the amorality of many of the characters. There are gruesome scenes from the beginning; the first episode starts with the cold-blooded killing of the staff and customers of a comics shop and later has one of the killers tying up one of the main characters and telling him, completely dispassionately: "Most torturers tend to have their favourite areas of the body to work on. Genitals... teeth... soles of the feet. With me, it's the eyes. Chillies... sand... bleach... a spoon."

Utopia is a thriller about a comic book and a conspiracy. The depth of the conspiracy, which goes back to the Cold War and involves a major pharmaceutical company and senior politicians – the Network – is revealed as the story progresses.

The comic at the heart of the series, *The Utopia Experiments*, describes the conspiracy, and has a cult following. A small group of fans – Becky (Alexandra Roach), who wants to do her PhD on the comic, Ian (Nathan Stewart-Jarrett), a very bored IT consultant, Wilson Wilson (Adeel Akhtar), a dedicated conspiracy nut and Grant (Oliver Woollford), an almost feral 11-year-old boy – meet on an online forum and discover that there's an unpublished sequel to the comic, which reveals more about the conspiracy, including the identity of one of its perpetrators.

The Network – who meet in a gorgeous Pugin-designed room filmed in Scarisbrook Hall, near Ormskirk, Lancashire – will stop at nothing to get their hands on the drawings of *Utopia* part two, killing, torturing, blackmailing, altering health records, setting people up for sexual crimes they never committed – forcing Becky, Ian, Wilson Wilson and Grant to go on the run.

Add in the mysterious Jessica Hyde (Fiona O'Shaughnessy), the daughter of the comic's creator, a brilliant scientist who ended his days in an asylum; on the run from the Network for years, she has become ruthless in order to survive. And a senior civil servant, blackmailed into an act which causes a government minister to resign. And an MI5 officer, and a feisty 11-year-old girl, and the cold, dark, dangerous members of the Network. James Fox and Geraldine James head the star guest list.

The story is imbued with moral ambiguity. Even the utter ruthlessness of the Network is shown to be a consequence of the logic at the heart of utilitarianism: the greatest good for the greatest number means that individuals are dispensable.

But considering the atmosphere of suspicion, threat and violence throughout, at times there's a surprising gentleness, even tenderness, between characters – and not just our comic-loving heroes. Even the psychologically damaged killer Arby (a wheezing and truly frightening Neil Maskell) is shown to have sensitive moments.

There are also some wonderful moments of very human humour, such as the drunken sex scene where Ian and Becky tear each other's clothes off, then there's a pause, and Ian says: "My penis isn't working."

Visually the series is quite startling: filmed in widescreen, with a strange use of colour. According to the commentary the colour effects come from using, instead of the usual red, green and blue, the mix of yellow, cyan and magenta that was used for the old Technicolor films; apparently the aim was to give the impression of Doris Day films, a nostalgic innocence completely at odds with the content of the series. But the use of over-bright colour and over-sharp lines also heightens the connection with comics.

It's strange that in neither the one episode commentary nor the other extras does anyone – writer, producer, directors, actors – comment on the graphic novel style of filmic composition throughout *Utopia*. The unusual use of widescreen for a TV series allows for stylised but beautiful landscape shots with, for example, a car or a person moving along a distant road across the frame. There's frequent use of quirky angles and perspectives, of odd close-up details, of point-of-view shots of one character by another, or past the backs of heads, with changes in framing clearly corresponding to the progression of comic panels.

The violence also owes much to comics. When people are shot there's a stylised splash of blood from the back of the head. There's one stunning scene of a car exploding, with the explosion following the person walking away from it across the frame, which in a comic would be across the width of the page.

To heighten the impression of reading a graphic novel even more, I recommend watching it with the subtitles on.

Outlining *Utopia's* intricate plot without spoilers would be impossible; suffice to quote writer Dennis Kelly: "I believe my job as a writer is to create characters that I care very much about and then do shit things to them." The last episode left a number of tantalising loose ends, ready to be explored in a second series announced for 2014.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

VIOLENT, TOUCHING DRAMA OF COMICS AND CONSPIRACY **9**

Continuum: Season 1

Dir various, US 2012
Universal Pictures UK, £24.99 (DVD)

From *The X-Files* to *Warehouse 13*, cop or FBI partners who initially appear mismatched (logical and intuitive, sceptic and believer, and, of course, male and female) but actually complement and become fiercely loyal to each other without becoming lovers, are a staple of American TV SF. *Continuum* is the latest. Many of these shows, wherever they're supposed to be set, are filmed in Vancouver; this one is unusual in actually being set there.

In 2077 the world is run by big corporations; political democracy and personal freedom no longer really exist. A revolutionary group, Liber8, kill thousands when they blow up a corporate building to spread their message of freedom. Kiera Cameron (Rachel Nichols) is one of the protectors (technologically-enhanced cops) responsible for capturing them, and is present at their planned execution. But Liber8 manage to fling themselves into the past, which they intend to change in order to prevent their future occurring – and Kiera is dragged back with them to 2012.

Liber8 start up their violent campaign, and Kiera, with her specialist knowledge and high-tech abilities, gets co-opted into the Vancouver police force to fight against them – though she can't tell her hunky new partner (straight out of central casting) the truth about who she is and where she's from. She stumbles across teenage computer genius Alec Sadler (Erik Knudsen), who guides and helps her and is able to access the liquid-chip technology in her brain because he has just designed it – and very soon she realises that she actually knows him as an old man in her own time (played by William B Davis, the Smoking Man from *The X-Files*). So was it entirely accidental that she was sent back in time? As she (inevitably) begins to get involved with a maverick member of Liber8 the question arises: is she perhaps there not to hinder but to help Liber8 stop her own time from being created?

It's an engaging premise which, as well as the usual time travel conundrums, should be full of moral ambiguity – but it doesn't really work. The show almost completely fails to portray the dysto-

The Reverend's Review

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com)

THE EVIL DEAD

Dir Fede Alvarez, US 2013
On UK release from 19 April

This *Evil Dead* 'rebirth' is the ultimate self-harm movie. Characters saw their arms off, hack into their cheeks and shoot themselves in the face with a nailgun. It boasts a level of uber-gore that your mum would label sick and barbaric; which is exactly why it works. Director Fede Alvarez has taken the mission statement of the original film (Raimi's closing credits proclaimed it as "the ultimate experience in gruelling terror") and has honoured it in blood. Lots of it.

The tale, as if you needed telling, is of five twentysomethings in an isolated cabin who accidentally summon up a demonic onslaught. This time round, they're helping troubled Mia kick her drug habit. So when she tearfully raves about demons in the woods they figure it's the cold turkey talking. She pleads to leave, they keep her there. Because they love her and want to help her. It's a nice irony while it lasts. By the time they realise there really *is* something out there, all hell (literally) breaks loose.

Some reviewers are complaining that Alvarez has missed the point of the original because there's little humour here. But I think they must be getting mixed up with *Evil Dead 2*. Raimi's first offering was pure, ghost train horror, which is exactly what this remake is. Even down to the whirring haunted house siren in the brilliantly effective score by Roque Baños. Speaking of the music, it's a significant element in the movie's impact, reminding us just how many contemporary horror soundtracks consist of bland, atmospheric padding and loud scares. But here, strong melody, inventive scoring and even a hellfire choir brings a shattering sense of doom. Gore never felt so epic.

But for all the high-octane shocks there are still moments of subtlety. Thankfully, Alvarez knows that you don't have to signpost every shot of a ghoul with an orchestral stab (*Woman in Black* take note). He also appreciates how to make us squirm in both extreme and simple ways (one of the most teeth-clenching scenes is just a woman putting the open bite on her trembling hand under a tap to clean it. Ouch).

Okay, the pace is somewhat uneven and half the characters are barely even one-dimensional. The exposition-heavy dialogue jars in places and, yes, the Deadites are too killable. And it all seems to end a few minutes before you expect it to. But by the time the film spits you out at the other end, you're thinking: "Wow! They actually did it". This is it that rare thing, a big studio remake that has the potential to delight newbies and fans of the original alike. No mean feat. And if they stay till after the credits roll, said fans may just punch the air with joy...

The original is still the better movie. It was the first film to ever give me nightmares (not surprising I guess, I was 11). Perhaps I'm jaded, because after this one I slept pretty soundly. But it's still a wild ride and an unpleasantly pleasant surprise. A bone-cracking thumbs up.

Fortean Times Verdict

A PLEASANTLY UNPLEASANT SURPRISE: A GOOD REMAKE **8**

pian nature of 2077; life in the future doesn't seem all that bad. And we're clearly supposed to have sympathy for Liber8's cause, but it's difficult because, on that famous fine line between terrorists and freedom fighters, most of this bunch are just thugs.

Continuum's plotting, dialogue and characterisation don't have the subtlety, wit or quirkiness – or, to be honest, the interest – of shows like *Fringe* and *Warehouse 13*. It's not bad as such; it's certainly watchable, but some of the acting is a bit wooden and it lacks both depth and sparkle. The storyline rarely surprises, with too many set-piece clichés of the genre; Kiera has at least one lengthy shootout or violent hands-on fight in every episode. It's basically just a police procedural set in the present day, with a cute but tough heroine who has electronic implants in her brain and a fancy one-piece suit full of gimmicks – including, gods help us, invisibility. But while other far more intelligent SF series like *Defying Gravity* are axed even before the end of their first season, *Continuum*, unaccountably, has been renewed. Maybe it'll mature into something more interesting in season two.
David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict
GREAT PREMISE, BUT FAILS TO DELIVER; DISAPPOINTING **6**

The Amazing Mr Blunden

Dir Lionel Jefries, UK 1972
Second Sight, £15.99 (DVD)

Quite simply, you either saw this first time round and loved it or have never seen it at all, such has been this early-Seventies gem's unavailability. Fresh from the success of *The Railway Children* (which proved home-grown British family fare could give Disney a run for its money), Lionel Jeffries tweaked that formula for his much darker follow-up. Taking Dickens and both Jameses (MR and Henry) as its cues, this is a dark ghost story of heroism and honour regained, which fits nicely with its initial post-WWI setting.

Mr Blunden is a ghostly benefactor (no spoiler; we know he's been dead 100 years almost immediately) who offers our impoverished hero-family an offer they can't refuse – a job as caretakers of an overgrown stately pile. Much ghostliness ensues.

A fabulous cast includes Laurence Naismith (at the time bossing Roger Moore and Tony Curtis around in *The Persuaders*), the lovely Madeline Smith, the ever-wonderful Diana Dors providing the pure villainy of Mrs Wickens, and teenage beauty Lynne Frederick.

It's a clever take on the classic ghost story – but, here, ghosts don't have to be dead, just seen in the wrong time (echoes of the classic Versailles time slip) and can even be in the same place in two forms at once (predating the *Back to the Future* conundrum.) It might give younger viewers nightmares – but that's what ghost stories are for.
Tim Weinberg

Fortean Times Verdict
A CHARMING GHOST STORY OF OLD-FASHIONED VALUES **9**

Willow

Dir Ron Howard, US 1988
20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, £12.99 (Blu-ray)

While *Star Wars* was George Lucas's attempt to sublimate his desire to be Joseph Campbell, *Willow*, which sees him in the guise of producer and story writer, was Lucas's attempt to sublimate his desire to be Tolkien. Here, Warwick Davis as the diminutive Willow (would-be wizard) Ulfgood sets off with a Moses-like human baby to deliver to a responsible human adult. His meeting with a caged Madmartigan (Val Kilmer) at a hangman's crossing is the beginning of an epic adventure pitting them against evil Dark Queen baby-stalker (Jean Marsh) and her massed sword-fodder minions. By turns deeply embarrassing and oddly endearing, it boasts impressive effects by Industrial Light and Magic and a surprisingly dark edge for 80s YA fare. Kilmer's knowing turn as the incorrigible adventurer would give Johnny Depp's Jack Sparrow more than a run for his money and is just about the best thing in the film. Director Ron Howard is stronger on sweeping landscapes, which look gorgeous in this 25th Anniversary Blu-ray edition, than he is in any breathtaking action stakes.
Nick Cirkovic

Fortean Times Verdict
LUCAS FANTASY CELEBRATES ITS QUARTER-CENTURY **6**

SHORTS

247°F

Anchor Bay, £15.99 (DVD) / £19.99 (Blu-ray)

Recovering from the death of her boyfriend in a car crash, Jenna (Scout Taylor-Compton) joins three friends (Travis Van Winkle, Christina Ulloa, Michael Copon) for a weekend break in a cabin in the woods. Three of the four then get trapped in the sauna, and the temperature is rising! Yes, it really is as lame as that sounds. This might have been intended merely as an exploitation excuse to get some "hot" young actors/actresses to appear near naked throughout, but even that gets dull after a few minutes. There's no suspense, no thrills, and no unexpected twist here, just a bunch of whiney, clichéd characters attacking each other. As a variation on *Buried* (2010, Ryan Reynolds buried alive), *Devil* (2010, people trapped in a lift with Satan), or even *Phone Booth* (2002, Kiefer Sutherland trapped in a phone box) *247°F* fails miserably to catch fire. **Brian J Robb** 3/10

THE FALLOW FIELD

Monster Pictures, £12.99 (DVD)

An average bloke wakes up in a field, with no memory of how he got there. Turning up after his lost week (it's not the first time this has happened) he gets dumped by both his wife and his mistress – which means, conveniently, that no one will miss him when he tries to piece together what's been happening to him and disappears again. Does he not have a job? Friends or family? I won't give away the explanation for his recurring disappearances, but it involves a scary farmer who is played by an actor who can't quite keep his character (or accent) in focus. There's an interesting idea behind this decently directed, micro-budget rural British horror flick, but it's let down by a basic lack of credibility as much as by a lack of funds. **David Sutton** 5/10

CRAWL

Arrow Films, £12.99 (DVD) / £15.99 (Blu-ray)

"Not since Blood Simple has there been a more exciting thriller debut… a twisted and skilful homage to film noir." I'd rephrase this bit of PR-speak: "Not since *Blood Simple* has there been a film so much like *Blood Simple*… or *No Country for Old Men* for that matter" But film noir? Want myriad plot twists and femme fatales aplenty? Well, you won't find them in this Aussie effort from director Paul China. George Shevtsov (in a performance so in thrall to Xavier Bardem's killer in the aforementioned film that he should be paying royalties) plays a nameless Croatian hitman who doesn't speak and looks a bit like Sam the American Eagle from *The Muppet Show*. Terrifying, yes, but in the wrong way. Admittedly, Georgina Haig, as pretty barmaid Marilyn, is stunning, the kind of Susan George type Rod Stewart would have given one of his large, tartan balls for (I refer to his inflatable stage props); but endless close-ups emphasising her beauty (usually in peril) only remind me of a rather better director with a thing for terrorising blondes. But there the comparisons must end. Seemingly made with an endowment from Poundland Australia and all for the cost of a wombat sarnie, this is small beer indeed and certainly not the modern neo-noir we are promised. Gory, without ever being shocking, this is very disappointing; it's like *Psycho* for the *Nuts* generation. **TW** 4/10

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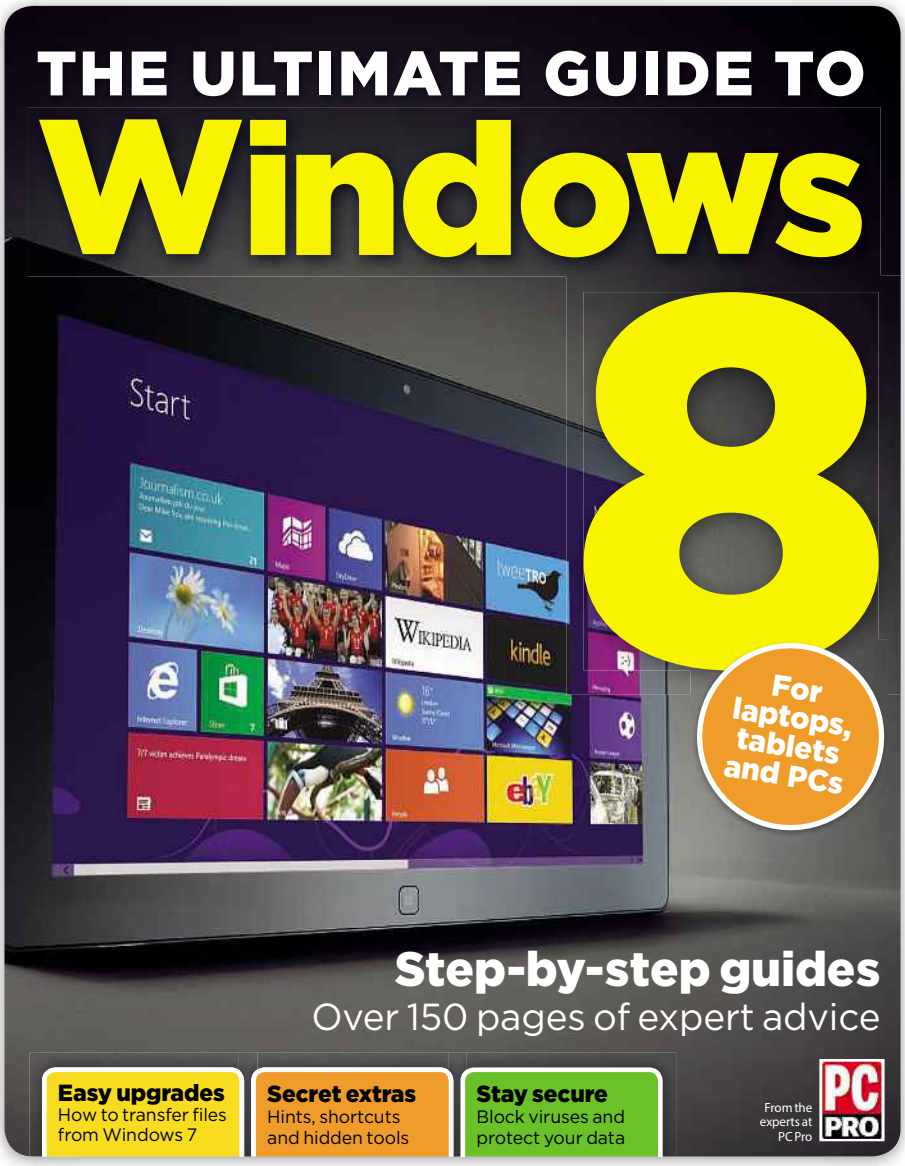

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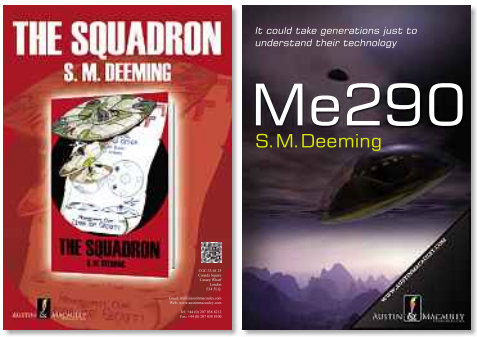

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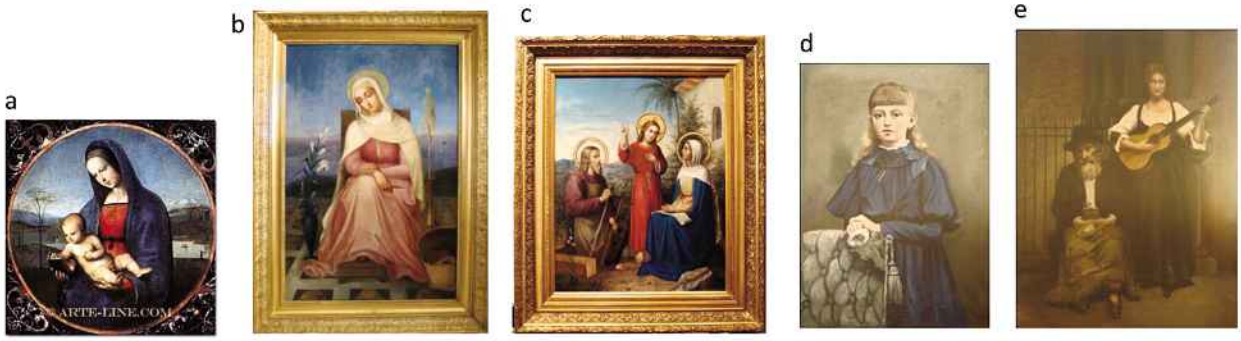

The Discovery oft the French Raphael.... Members of the *Nutritional-Herbal Healing Assoc.* have, during the course of their fundraising efforts, discovered by mere chance several lost fine art paintings . In the case of Pierre Auguste Renoir, who worked around 1880 as artist in Italy studying the classical works of Raphael Santi, we are talking of an absolute Art World Sensation ..... Renoir's Virgin Without Child (b) was painted under the influence of Raphael's Virgin (a). Renoirs 2 religious paintings (b) and (c) show similarities . For instance, the head-shoulder scarfs on Mary are both beige in colour and are folded in a similar way. Additionally through scientific infrared examinations , we could make visible the typical markings , signatures and monograms of Renoir. The fine art paintings shown have all been certified in regard to age in an Italian museum , that specialises in the discovery of forgeries .

Despite all the documentation of authenticity had been provided in Paris and London to the Experts, no recognition on a total of six paintings has been given . This our discoveries are an absolute sensation, which the cartel wants now fraudulently to suppress and keep from the art world . This became especially clear when , with the rejection of the two religious paintings , the typical Renoir paintings < Girl With Flower > 1880 (d) and his friend < Claude Monet As Beggar, 1900 (e) were also rejected. The cartel has a long history of corruption, theft and fraud and has with this latest action caused a S c a n d a l and we find their practices should be exposed .

We call therefore on all experts for fine art ... around the world.... to unite with us to break the blockage by the Babylonian Brotherhood and their cartel . Please contact us, it will be to your benefit....

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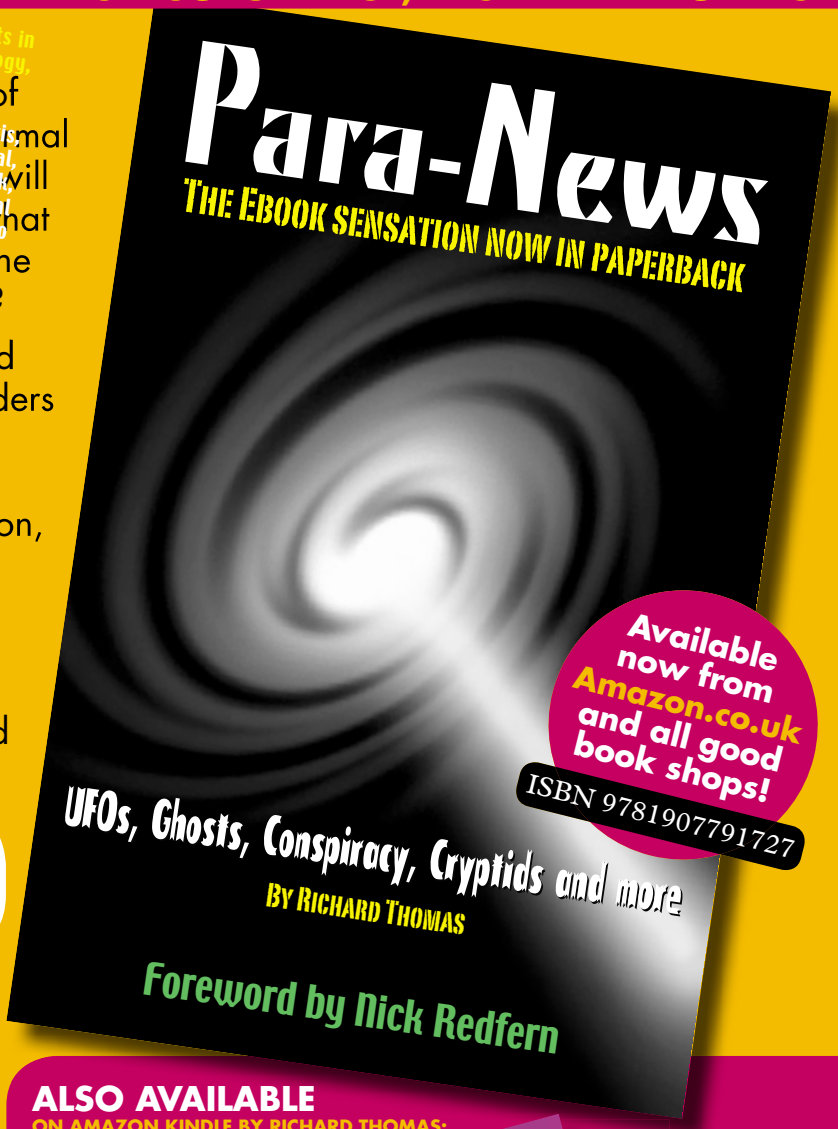
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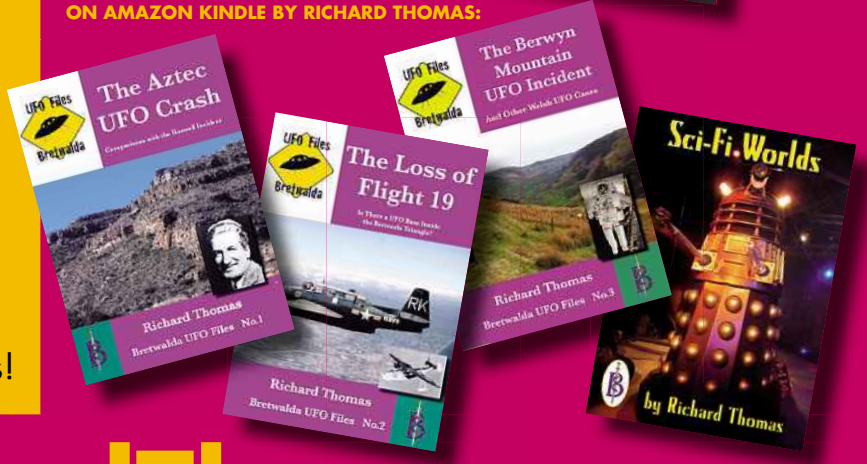

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Richard Thomas is also a contributing writer to **CSO - the New Cult Television Fanzine**

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Dear FT...

letters

Ancient Astronauts

I really enjoyed the Fortean Dictionary of the Damned entry about Ancient Astronauts [**FT299:40-42**], which articulated several favourite hobbyhorses of mine better than I could have done myself. In particular, I've always been struck by how childishly anthropocentric the majority of New Age theories are, and I couldn't agree more that "the whole ancient-astronaut mythos is a facet of the human tendency to narcissism, but inflated to cosmic proportions".

But I think there is an important distinction between the naïve thinking of most New Agers, and the more profound (though often misconstrued) ideas of HP Lovecraft, who is mentioned earlier in the piece. Lovecraft was at the opposite end of the scale from the fluffy-minded New Agers, using cosmic imagery to emphasise the sheer insignificance of human existence rather than its importance.

This comes out in the following passage from a letter Lovecraft wrote in 1927 (quoted by ST Joshi in the introduction to the Penguin edition of *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*): "Now all my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large. To me there is nothing but puerility in a tale in which the human form – and the local human passions and conditions and standards – are depicted as native to other worlds or other universes. To achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have any existence at all."

Andrew May
Crewkerne, Somerset

I am not sure that the Ancient Astronaut Hypothesis (AAH) is quite as unsustainable as the Hierophant's Assistant suggests. I think the basic idea that sky gods, which figure in most ancient religions, could have been inspired by technologically superior visitors from outer space is perfectly reasonable. We can see in the cargo cults of the Pacific what happens when modern man, equipped with helicopters and radios, interacts with a primitive people: they end up being worshipped as gods. Even Carl Sagan, hardly an advocate of New Age ideas, was prepared to accept the possibility of ancient visitations by extraterrestrials. Of course, the problem starts when you want to write a book and need to pad it out with a lot more material than can be justified by the basic premise. It is then that you start to see the highly speculative corollaries (e.g. aliens built the pyramids) that were rightly ridiculed in the article.

Geoff Clifton
Solihull, West Midlands

Impersonating Jack

Further to Jacob Middleton's fascinating "Spurious Spirits" article [**FT297:32-37**] and Alistair Moffatt's subsequent letter [**FT299:68-69**], I can add another example of someone impersonating a ghost (or at least something ghost-like), which I very much doubt is widely known.

When I was researching local accounts of Spring-heeled Jack sightings for my book *Haunted Wandsworth* (The History Press, 2006), I came across a brief comment tucked away in an article dated 20 January 1939 in the Balham, Tooting, Mitcham *News & Mercury*. The author, reminiscing about life in Tooting (south London) in years gone by, wrote: "We had some fun in the old village. A fellow dressed in a sheet used to frighten people as 'Spring Heeled Jack' in Back-lane, which was unlighted and lonely." 'Back-lane' is now Rectory Lane, leading north from Amen Corner in Tooting. Although no date for this japery was given, it seems reasonable to assume that the author was referring to events that had taken place in the late 19th century.

(I don't know the title of this article. I found it as a newspaper clipping in *Wandsworth Notes*, vol.6, p32. *Wandsworth Notes* is a sort of scrapbook of newspaper articles, photographs, etc of local interest, in several volumes, stored at the Wandsworth Local Studies Centre at Battersea Library.)

James Clark
Mitcham, Surrey

Today's Ghost Story

Alan Murdie [Ghostwatch, **FT299:14**] states that the BBC *Today* programme's 'Thought for the Day' slot falls "somewhere between Richard Dawkins's atheism and a liberal Church of England version of Christianity." In fact, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu speakers are all regularly featured in this slot, while atheist voices, whether of Richard Dawkins or anyone else, are not permitted. The real unexplained phenomenon here is why in 2013 the most influential news broadcast in Britain breaks off at peak-time every morning to deliver a short sermon that can only come from someone who believes in a supernatural deity. The *Today* programme may not "do ghost stories", but it religiously and relentlessly does the biggest ghost story of them all.

Martin Stubbs
London,

Relict hominids

Reading the article by Crabtree and Coleman (**FT298:31-35**) on relict hominids, it seems to me that these populations (Yeti, Sasquatch, Yowie, etc.) are unlikely to be surviving Neanderthals. The latter were highly advanced creatures who used fire for cooking and warmth, and possessed a range of sophisticated tools. As far as I know, no one claims that the supposed cryptid hominids use either fire or tools, though these were developed by very early members of the genus Homo such as *H. habilis* and *H. erectus*. Is it possible, I wonder, that the surviving hominids (if there are such) are australopithecines rather than members of our genus? Or, under stress from the advance of *H. sapiens*, have the remaining Neanderthals regressed to a more primitive way of life?

Dr Pete Swindells
Wolverhampton, West Midlands

Losing virginity

According to Mythconceptions 161 [**FT297:23** – referring to www.livescience.com/13553-5-myths-women-bodies.html], "Studies have found that even when examined at magnification, using special equipment, the sexual organs of most individual women show no discernible change before and after first intercourse". However, I feel that this leaves a lot unanswered. When were these studies carried out, and by whom? What kind of 'special equipment' was used? How were women recruited to these studies? And how on Earth could the researchers be certain that their subjects had no prior sexual experience? As we now know, there is "no way a doctor can tell".

* Wouldn't 'seer-sucker' be a fitting name for someone who is taken in by end-time prophets?

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway

Ghost Island

Sandy Island [**FT297:9**] may not be the only 'ghost' of its kind. According to Jeff Rubin's *Lonely Planet* guide to Antarctica, a figment of cartographic imagination called Swain's Island was depicted in one atlas as late as 1995. It would have been in the Southern Ocean, roughly equidistant between New Zealand and South America, and may have been a misidentification of an iceberg carrying rocks and moraine, or tinted green by chlorophyll from marine plants.

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

letters

RICHARD LINGARD

ABOVE: The Gambia is home to some 1,700 stone circles, such as these two examples, most of them built between AD 640 and 860 on even older burial sites.

Senagambian Stones

Several friends enthused about their travels to and in The Gambia, and the *Rough Guide* mentioned stone circles, so I went there for 11 days in November 2012. Organising malaria prophylactics was straightforward; no visa was required, and the six-hour flight from Gatwick was in the same time zone, so no jet lag.

Through the travel company, I had a guide plus a four-wheel-drive vehicle and driver to take me to sites north of the River Gambia. There are approximately 1,700 stone circles in Senegambia, most erected between AD 640 and 860 on earlier graves. A British couple I'd just met expressed an interest in the two spare seats, as they had on previous visits 'done' all of the other excursions on offer. We drove nearly 300km (186 miles) parallel to the north riverbank and nearly missed the sign to Kerr Batch, a site of circles a few kilometres up a dirt track. The stone circles are of mainly regular stones, deeply pitted where the iron has eroded out of the laterite. Inside a couple of the circles are stones marking burials that existed before the circles were put up. (Excavation of such burial mounds has produced material dating back to the 3rd century BC.) Kerr Batch – Sinchu Demba is its Gambian name – has a broken and mended V-shaped lyre stone and a small yet interesting museum, well worth seeing.

We continued to Wassu and the circles and museum there. Wassu is not far from Janjanbureh (formerly the colonial capital, Georgetown). A stallholder sitting under a tree selling souvenirs played a xylophone-type wooden instrument, ideal background music to seeing the stones – which have pebbles balanced on the top, put there by local visitors who are perhaps copying cairns in the Himalayas or on Kilimanjaro. The Wassu museum keeper interrupted his lunch to show us around, giving as much explanation as is available.

Our guide hurried us to leave Wassu because, unbeknown to us, he had booked a five-hour boat ride down the river to the bush camp where supper would be ready and we'd spend the night. It was a lovely trip, complete with a sighting of a hippo, and very noisy with birdsong. The two gents drove the vehicle to Janjanbureh, where we met them the next morning for the 300km drive 'home' along the south riverbank. I would love to go back for longer and see more, learn more…

Paddy Long
Nottingham

Editor's note: These stone circles are found in The Gambia north of Janjanbureh and in central Senegal, and are spread over thousands of miles. The 10 to 24 stones in each circle vary in height from 1 to 2.5m (3-8ft) and can weigh up to 10 tons. They were quarried with iron tools and skilfully shaped into almost identical cylindrical or polygonal pillars. UNESCO added the circles to the World Heritage List in 2006.

It Kept Escaping

I was intrigued to read Crispin Andrews's article suggesting that a Tasmanian 'tiger' was roaming the Lake District in 1810 [**FT298:37-41**] – the more so as I actually read the article while on holiday in Tasmania. The piece rang a bell as I have a reference from the *North Devon Journal* of 20 August 1868 headed "Escape of the Tasmanian Devil from Bostock & Wombwell's Royal Menagerie". This circus had been in Bideford and during feeding time the "devil" – "which formed one of the chief attractions of this collection" – managed to escape. The animal ran down the town's quay and leapt into the River Torridge. A follow-up article two weeks later noted it had been recaptured in a local farmyard where it "had made havoc among the poultry".

That this was a 'devil' and not a 'tiger' is clear from the description given – but what really struck me was the sentence "This is the third time the 'devil' has escaped during the brief period it has been with the menagerie, the first occurring at St. Day, in Cornwall; and the second at St. Just, in the same county, when it took a three days' holiday to visit the 'logan' stone." I am aware that "escaped circus animals" was an explanation often trotted out to describe out-of-place animals, but in this case it appears to be true – and I do wonder if allowing unusual creatures to escape wasn't a Victorian publicity stunt!

Whilst on the island I bought *Tasmanian Tiger* by Eric Guiler and Philippe Godard, which is a wonderful compendium on the animal with a whole section on possible recent sightings of this supposedly extinct marsupial.

Peter Christie
Bideford, Devon

'Ghost' Identified

The photograph of an alleged ghost taken on Clevedon pier in Somerset one morning last year at about 6.45am [**FT287:6**] was actually that of a local fisherman. He recognised himself when he saw the picture in the *Bristol Evening Post*.

Paul Thomas
Easton-in-Gordano, North Somerset

PAUL TAYLOR

Simulacra corner

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.

FORTEAN FACES

1 Peter Gwilt captured this skull formed by flames while on holiday at an old cottage in Shropshire.

2 This shirt face arrived at Fortean Towers in 2011. We've mislaid the note of who sent it to us – sorry!

3 John Brennan saw a sinister face created by a lab coat thrown down carelessly by a colleague.

4 A hinge face on a gate into Polegrove Park, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, spotted by Paul Kitchenham.

5 Stewart Williams of Seattle noticed his bag in the kitchen looked "suspiciously like a Blue Meanie" (the baddies in the Beatles' cartoon, Yellow Submarine).

it happened to me...

First-hand accounts from *FT* readers and browsers of www.forteantimes.com

Tall, dark And thin

Chapter 10 of your publication *It Happened To Me!* (Volume 5) on "The Shadow People: Inexplicable Entities from a Dark Dimension" reminded me of my own experiences. In 2003 I had a really terrible job in Southend-on-Sea, Essex, and my work colleagues were horrible – nasty and unhelpful. I was put under a lot of pressure, and after nine months I left. While all this was going on, I started to have some very odd experiences.

I used to walk to and from work each day – a journey of about 30 minutes through town. On my way back from work, I used to see, from out of the corner of my eye, a tall, dark, thin figure keeping pace with me. It stayed about 50ft (15m) behind me. I was never able to see it directly even though I turned around many times to try and catch it out. If I increased my pace, it fell behind, but very soon I would catch sight of it again and it would be at the same distance away from me as before.

I'd say that it was about 7-8ft (2-2.4m) tall and very thin, almost like a stickman. Its waist seemed to be only about 8in (20cm) across. It was very dark but not black in colour, and looked two-dimensional, almost flat. Needless to say it freaked me out.

My rented flat in Britannia Road, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex, was unfurnished and barn-like in size. There was a big brown stain on the carpet when I moved in. I joked that that was where someone had died. The flat was also close to a bleak estuary, which was pretty spooky and forbidding at night.

And finally, there were many urban foxes nearby so one had the odd experience of walking around at night and seeing these scavengers everywhere. All this came to an end when I left my job and moved away from the area.

What could it have been? I offer the following suggestions:

1. Work pressure. I was fairly tired and stressed and might have been seeing something that wasn't actually there. In other words, it was only my imagination.

2. The flip side of this: my stress made me more sensitive to seeing something that was actually there. In other words, the thing was real; it wasn't my imagination.

3. Being tired and stressed may have attracted the thing – like blood in the water to a shark – and the thing homed in.

4. Nastiness from work colleagues, directed at me, might have led the thing to me, or actually created it; a tulpa or thought-form of some kind.

One of my colleagues was a practising witch, so I wonder if she'd placed a curse on me. I don't believe in that stuff, so even if she had done so it would have been meaningless.

M R James's story "Casting The Runes" comes to mind, but fortunately no one gave me a slip of paper!

I'm a naturally sceptical person, but it difficult to know what to make of it.

N Faber
By email

Stick man

Back in 1978-79 when I was four or five years old, we lived in County Clare, Ireland, renting a house from a local farmer. One night my elder brother and sister ushered me out into the hall while playing a game. I clearly remember being scared and saw coming from my right a tall, white stickman, walking extremely quickly, as if in fast forward, very similar to the one in the titles of the TV programme *The Saint*, only he had a black goatee beard and flowing moustache, much like Ming The Merciless from *Flash Gordon*.

Another time, shortly after this, we were playing football in the early evening outside my great uncle Johnny's house when the ball went around the back. As I went to fetch it, I saw the stickman again walking around the gable end of the house, again very quickly. I screamed and my mum recalls running from the local well to the house, and finding me absolutely terrified, being comforted by my great uncle and brother. You could argue that the first incident was brought on by my active imagination at being scared and in the dark; but then what would explain the second incident happening in daylight while having fun playing football? Also, why did I see exactly the same man?

> "On my way back from work, from out of the corner of my eye, I used to see a tall, dark, thin figure"

Have any readers seen anything like the stickman, or was it really just my imagination?

This is one of many weird incidents regarding my Irish family. We were pestered for years by three knocks, which followed us from Ireland to our house in Brixton Hill, south London, where I grew up. That house was spooked. My mum heard the banshee wail years ago the day before her aunt died very close to where I spotted the stickman at my great uncle's house.

Colin Larkin
Sidcup, Kent

Kentucky critter

I was born in Kentucky, and my family moved to Florida in 1960. Growing up I would read a column in the Sunday newspaper entitled, "Strange to Relate". One of the stories was about "The Holopaw Monster", a creature that was sighted occasionally near the tiny Florida town surrounded by palmetto scrub. A popular theory was that it was a gorilla that had escaped during a train derailment while on its way to the Winter Circus Headquarters in Sarasota. What a thrill it was to read an account of this creature in *The Goblin Universe*, one of John Keel's books! It refers to these creatures as 'Hairy Bipeds', and they have

ETIENNE GILFILLAN

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been sighted in practically every state – including Kentucky. One night while reading about them, I remembered something that happened while visiting my grandparents one summer in Winchester, Kentucky.

My grandparents, Chester and Pearl Gibson, lived on a farm out in the country. I was 15 or 16 years old when I spent the night in their farmhouse, which was built before the Civil War. 'Nan' had opened the window so I could get a breeze on this particularly warm summer night. Sometime during the night I heard what sounded like something crashing through the woods. As I listened to the apparent breaking of tree limbs and snapping of twigs, the farm animals suddenly broke into a cacophony of cackles, grunts and whinnies. Then, there was silence. All I could now hear were the crickets. The next morning I asked Nan and Granddaddy if they had heard the commotion during the night. I was concerned that perhaps someone had been driving a truck on the 'back forty'. My grandfather couldn't see how that could happen since the gates were locked but he decided to take a look anyway since there had been a recent incident involving copper wire theft along the railroad tracks that ran behind the farm.

With the hot morning sun bearing down on us, Grandaddy and I hiked across the field amid the enigmatic buzzing sound heard during the daytime in rural areas of Kentucky. As we approached the area where I thought the commotion came from, the ground began to slope downwards toward a wooded ravine. Sure enough, we saw what looked like a path something had made through the thicket. A few broken tree limbs were still hanging by shredded strips of bark. It was this same ravine that used to draw me into its wooded depths as a boy spending my summer vacations on the farm. My imagination would run away with me as I played alongside the creek that snaked through the bottom of the ravine making its way to Red River. My fantasies would suddenly turn into fear as I got the feeling I was not alone down there, as if I were being watched by someone or something. I would then scurry up the steep incline and run like mad across the field to the farmhouse.

As I wondered out loud to Granddaddy how someone could manoeuvre a truck down that steep slope, he suddenly decided we should go back to the house as he turned and walked hurriedly away in his characteristic limping gait. Later that day I overheard my grandparents talking in hushed voices in the kitchen when Nan said, "Now Chester, don't go scaring everybody". Then Nan remarked, "I wonder if that's what Sandy saw?"

While visiting the farm one day, my cousin Sandy was taking a walk on the 'back forty' in the same area where Granddaddy and I saw the broken tree branches when she saw something that frightened her. Her grandmother tried to tell her she had probably seen a bear, prompting the teenager to reply, "Nan, I know what a bear looks like."

Country folk are a peculiar lot. They have observed things that they do not understand but accept their existence.

Greg May
Orlando, Florida

ETIENNE GILFILLAN

Supermarket ghost

In 1999, my stepdaughter, whom I'll call Jayne, was night supervisor of a large supermarket in the Midlands, in her forties and very practical-minded.

At night the store did not have all its lights on, and Jayne was standing in one of the aisles at 3.20am when she clearly saw a figure wearing a football 'strip' run across the opening about 15ft (4.6m) away from her. She said it was "bright and clear but made absolutely no sound" and reckons it took about four seconds before the fixtures hid it from view. Thinking it might be a hoax, she hurried to the coffee room, where all her 'crew' were having their break – none was missing and none would have had time to change.

Twice before she had seen a "dark shadow", which she described as the brief appearance of a scarf-like shape, usually near the bakery section. Someone else had also seen this.

Apparently, the store was built on the site of a football field, and in 1984 a spectator ran on the pitch and was involved in a fatal accident. We do not know any details, but it was said by the staff to have been just about where the apparition was seen. When Jayne described the dress it transpired that it was in the correct colours for that era.

Next morning she approached the security staff to see if anything had shown up on the video, but nothing had – even though a camera was angled above where the vision had been seen. There was also the matter of a trapdoor to the loft that was found to be open at the time, but store staff searched the space above and found no sign of an intruder. In any case, anyone up there would have set off the burglar alarm.

Reg W Selfe
Benfleet, Essex

Circular rainbow

One fine summer day when I was about 13, my mother and I were looking at the pond in our garden in Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, to decide how best to give it some new life. It was a sad time as my parents had just separated and my mother was really not herself. As we looked at the pond, we saw a circular rainbow reflected in the water, and turning our heads skyward, there sure enough was a perfectly circular rainbow right at the top of the canopy of clear blue sky. This was perhaps the most beautiful thing I've ever seen, and we both took great comfort from it as a positive omen of better times ahead.

Jules Landau
Bristol

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FORTEAN TRAVELLER

85. Kerali kallana capers

MATT SALUSBURY takes a voyage to India in search of *kallana* – the elusive pygmy elephants reported from the Kerala region.

The south Indian state of Kerala is officially "God's own country" – although I heard that Kerala Tourism appropriated the phrase from the stall of a small Latin American country they'd seen at a travel fair. In March 2011, I took a couple of weeks off work and went to Kerala to investigate reports in the local English language press of *kallana*, the alleged pygmy elephant of that region.

One of the attractions of this expedition was that Neyyar-Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary – reputed home to *kallana* – wasn't exactly at the ends of the Earth or only reachable after months of trekking through wild and inhospitable jungle. *Kallana*'s alleged habitat was just 35 miles (56km) from the state capital and the international airport at Trivandrum. Compared to the cryptids supposedly living in the wilds of Mongolia or half way up the Himalayas, *kallana* was right under our noses.

So I found myself in India's most laid-back state capital, Thiruvananthapuram – so good they named it twice. "Thiruvananthapuram" was a bit of a mouthful for the British when they moved into the then Kingdom of Travancore, so they adopted "Trivandrum", a three-syllable, anglicised version of city's name. It means "Holy Snake City", after the huge statue of Lord Vishnu reclining on the serpent Anantha inside the main Padmanabhaswamy temple. I only saw a drawing of its interior – like many Hindu temples in India, it's closed to non-devotees.

This being India, getting hold of my star interviewee and *kallana* eyewitness Sali Palode proved complicated. He wasn't answering his agent's phone calls; but at least his non-availability gave me the opportunity to go upstate to see some young captive elephants at Kodanad Elephant Camp, a facility for rescued elephants being trained for work in forestry and tourism. It was good to get up close to them, and to compare young, conventionally sized elephants with photos I'd seen of *kallana*.

I naively imagined that elephants approaching would make the ground shake with their great feet, like something out of *Godzilla*. But as I stood on the banks of the Periyar River, watching the younger elephants being bathed by their mahouts, the only indication that another elephant – a tusker who must have been over 8ft (2.4m) high – was right behind me was when his mahout put his hand on my shoulder and politely asked me if I could get out of the way. The 8ft elephant moved completely silently. I was also mistaken in my belief that young elephants loved going into the river for a bath. They absolutely *hated* it. The mahouts somehow managed to subdue these beasts, which could have crushed them with ease, just by gently pulling their tails.

Down the road from Kodanad was the sad little Kerala Forest Department (KFD) zoo for 'rescued' animals, which was, frankly, not fit for purpose. However, nearby, the finishing touches were being put on its replacement – a spacious park with big enclosures where herds of animals could run in a near-wild state. Some of the deer had been moved in, and the chief warden of the 'rescue centre' said its first rescued elephant was due to move there within a few months.

The warden, with some pride, asked me if I'd spotted another Kerali pygmy – "our own dwarf muntjac deer" – as if his herd of dog-sized, short-antlered, fanged, barking muntjac were the most exotic animals on the planet. I had to break it to him that, while muntjac may be native to Kerala, they were introduced to the grounds of English stately homes some time ago and have since escaped to become so common as to be widely regarded as vermin. To this the warden replied, with a wry smile: "That is the consequence of

BOTH PHOTOS: MATT SALUSBURY

BELOW LEFT: Elephants turn up everywhere in Kerala.

BELOW RIGHT: One of the Kodanad elephants with a mahout.

your folly!" If he was referring to the British conquest of India, then Britain's subsequent karma, presumably, is to be overrun by Indian muntjac deer.

Sali Palode's agent, Balan Madhavan, had finally tracked his client down. I met them both at the Trivandrum Press Club. It was a noisy interview, as retired journalists, wandering in and out of the reading room where we talked, would interrupt to greet Balan. Sali is shy and retiring with short grey hair and glasses, and spoke quietly in Malayalam, with Balan's deep, more confident voice, interpreting for me in English.

A drawing teacher for the past 25 years, Sali taught at a school near the mountain town of Palode in the hills not far from Trivandrum, on the edge of the forest near where he grew up. From an early age, he would trek in the forest with his father or with friends from the local Kani 'tribal' community. He eventually managed to borrow some photographic equipment and take pictures of the wildlife he saw. He's since won over 70 awards, but, according to Balan, all the money Sali has made from photography has been ploughed back into kit – like the huge Canon lens I saw him use when we later went into the forest together.

Where did Sali first hear about *kallana*, I asked. From the 'tribals': "25 years back, on a trek to the Agustya mountains, on the top." There Sali and his Kani guide Mallan Kani saw "small elephant droppings" that "belong to *kallana*".

Since that encounter a quarter of a century earlier, Sali and Mallan have been looking for *kallana*. Sali described how he first "got a picture in 2005" of a *kallana*, one of a group of four, (**FT252:42-47**) and also photographed what he says is a dead adult female *kallana* by a lake. *Kallanas'* stomping grounds are in the Neyyar-Peppara reserve, among the Agustya Mala hills, which have become a Hindu pilgrimage centre, and Sali says *kallana* are moving down from the higher altitudes due to "human intervention" on the hills. The animal is agile, and can climb hills very fast, a feat which Sali has seen himself.

Sali pointed out that his *kallana* photos show "long limbs" and that "the skin is wrinkled," which he says is evidence that these are adults. What convinced Sali of the adulthood of the "tusker" male he photographed in 2010 **(FT263:25)** were "skin details… long tail, really hairy". And then there were the tusks – certainly more developed than the ones I'd seen on younger elephants at Kodonad.

The search for one cryptid usually throws up some other unexpected mystery animals as well. Sali said one Kani elder had shown him another Kerali cryptid, a purple-bodied tree crab that lives in "gaps on trees". The Kani use this mystery tree crab as "medicine, for the ears". Balan mentioned another Kerali cryptid – the *pogeyan*, or "clouded leopard", an alleged smoky brown-grey leopard without spots, dwelling in the far north of Kerala and moving in and out of the tea plantations of Malabar. He knows one forest officer who's seen a *pogeyan*.

BOTH PHOTOS: MATT SALUSBURY

ABOVE: Sali Palode, ready for action with his camera.

LEFT: Sali (left) and Mallan Kani at the spot where they found the dead *kallana* in 2005.

The forest was humid and I was sweating buckets by now

Warden Sharma, the Trivandrum District Chief Wildlife Warden, had given permission for me to enter the Neyyar-Peppara sanctuary, but only for the day, and only if accompanied by Sali and his guide, Mallan Kani.

Next day I got up very early for a possibly inadvisable 25-mile (40km) trip in a motorised rickshaw-turbo-milk-float, which meant I arrived 10 minutes late for our rendezvous with Sali at the hill town of Vithura. As we passed a shiny suburban showroom for the new Indian-built Tata Nano economy car, my rickshaw driver said with disdain that his vehicle exceeded the 43mph (70km/h) maximum speed of a Tata Nano.

Soon Sali and I stood before the green and red sign of the Kerala Forest Department at the entrance to Neyyar-Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary, where Sali's guide Mallan Kani was waiting. Mallan was a more outgoing character, and he and Sali had a Malayam-language Laurel and Hardy camaraderie thing going, as they marched off ahead through the thick forest at a brisk pace I could barely keep up with. "Faster!" Mallan would occasionally call to me.

We went through paddies and low-impact cashew and rubber plantations, past an anti-elephant trench and Kani houses with solar panels, and then uphill and into deep forest. The trail was steep and narrow, and we walked single-file. Mallan said it was an elephant track. It was difficult enough for humans, and only the piles of elephant dung – with mushrooms growing out of them – told us these were elephant paths.

The forest was humid and I was sweating buckets by now, my heart racing due to the humidity and altitude. Brilliant blue and white butterflies flitted around us, and there were biting ants that drew blood if you were foolish enough to sit down for long. Strange hooting, whistling, laughing birds called to us; one sounded like Mutley from *Wacky Races* cursing.

Mallan took us on a steep downward descent to the spot where they had

PHOTOS: MATT SALUSBURY

found the body of the female elephant in 2005, by a lake with the Agusthya Mala in the distance behind. Suddenly, he cried: "*Gaur*! *Gaur*!" After getting us into cover behind some trees, he disappeared into the forest. Sali took out his massive Canon lens and screwed it into his camera, crouching in the trees just ahead of me at the forest's edge.

Ten minutes later came a thundering of hooves, and a large herd of curly-horned *gaur* – wild bison – appeared, charging straight at us. Sali got up and started running. I decided to stay put, reasoning that the trees would stop them charging directly at me. They veered to the left and charged uphill. Sali was running *after* the herd, camera at the ready. I missed most of it, having got tangled in a thicket. Following in the wake of the *gaur* came a cloud of stinging flies. Sali ripped a branch off a bush, and beat them away.

Mallan reappeared; he'd flushed out the gaur for our benefit. His forestry skills were impressive. Some say that *kallana* are just young elephants playing a short distance from a herd that's unseen and close by – but if there were a herd close by, Mallan would certainly know about it.

We stopped at the next Kani settlement. Plastic chairs were produced for Sali and me, and, ascending a little bamboo ladder, one of the Kani neighbours went up a tree to get fresh coconuts for lunch – a rare privilege, as access to 'tribal' areas is usually restricted. Sali and I bade farewell to Mallan at the Forest Department post by the sanctuary's entrance. Sali and Balan have been tracking *kallana* for at least a decade, and had only three encounters and one dodgy sighting of its dung. The chances of me tripping over *kallana* – or even a conventional elephant – in the thick forest, were never great.

Back in Trivandrum, I encountered statues of what were described as *makara* –"unicorns" or "elephant dragons" – horse-bodied, eagle-clawed beasts with elephants' heads, often

The elephant dragons were carved in the 18th century

associated with a small elephant that accompanies them. Some grasped their trunks in their talons, some had trunks reaching down towards considerably smaller "baby elephants" whose trunks reached up to theirs. Some had small crests on their heads. Some had multiple tusks growing out of the sides of their mouth where their teeth should be, like the mouthparts of a monster prawn.

There were "elephant dragons" in the Maharaja of Travancore's palace and in the huge temple next door. The palace and temple guides told me the "elephant dragons" were carved in the late 18th century, during Travancore's zenith. I was told the *makara* are not exclusive to India, and there's been little research into their origins. They feature fleetingly in Bernard Heuvelmans's *In the Wake of the Sea Serpents*, but as sea creatures. The *makara* in Trivandrum, and on the coat of arms of the neighbouring State of Karnataka, were definitely land animals.

I also spent 24 hours in Bangalore, to visit Asian elephant expert Professor Raman Sukumar at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), a university campus so vast it has its own airstrip.

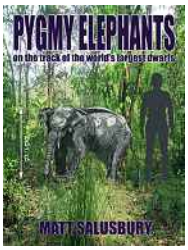
"Don't, whatever you do, come on 31 March – it's the end of the financial year," advised Professor Sukumar. The Union Government in New Delhi demands all taxes are paid by the end of this date, on pain of considerable penalties. The last day of the financial year is bedlam. Most banks are open all night for receipt of government revenues, still mostly done in cash. Sukumar has to reconcile the accounts of the IISc's Institute of Ecology that he heads by the end of a very long day. So we met on April Fool's Day instead.

Professor Sukumar is *the* expert on Asian elephants, but like every head of department he has a lot of admin to deal with. As well as having to sign leave requests for departmental staff during our interview, Sukumar was interrupted by a bizarre marketing call from a mobile company, following an inquiry about billing for SIM cards. It turned out the two SIM cards they were talking about were "for elephants" – they were in radio collars awaiting deployment on elephants in West Bengal. The professor told me he had a hard time explaining to the mobile company that he didn't know the mobile numbers for the SIM cards, as they were radio-tracking devices for elephants, and no, they didn't want free weekend calls… FT

ABOVE LEFT: A herd of *gaur*, or wild bison, thunder past.

ABOVE RIGHT: Professor Raman Sukumar, an expert on Asian elephants.

LEFT: A *makara* at the Maharaja of Travancore's palace.



This is an edited extract from *Pygmy Elephants – On the Track of the World's Biggest Dwarfs*, published by CFZ Press (www.cfz.org.uk) later this year. The blog of the book is at http://pygmyelephants.blogspot.co.uk

Sali Palode's website www.salipalode.com has his photos of *kallana*, and of the tree crab (the latter on the 'Insects' page).

MATT SALUSBURY (pictured here somewhat the worse for wear) is a regular *FT* contributor and author of *Pygmy Elephants – On the Track of the World's Biggest Dwarfs*, published by CFZ Press later this year.

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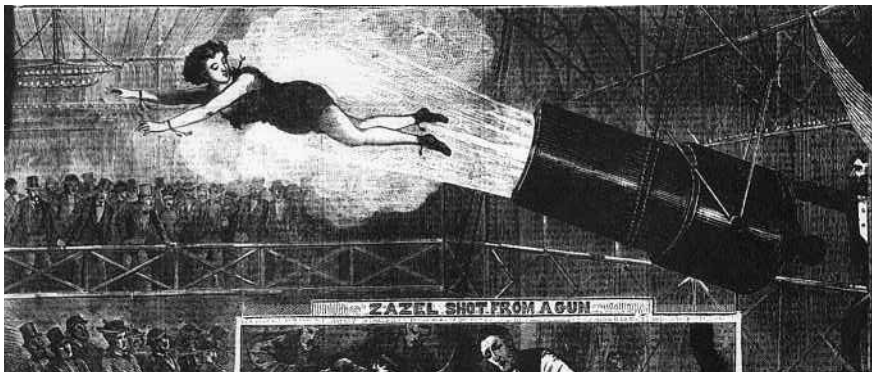
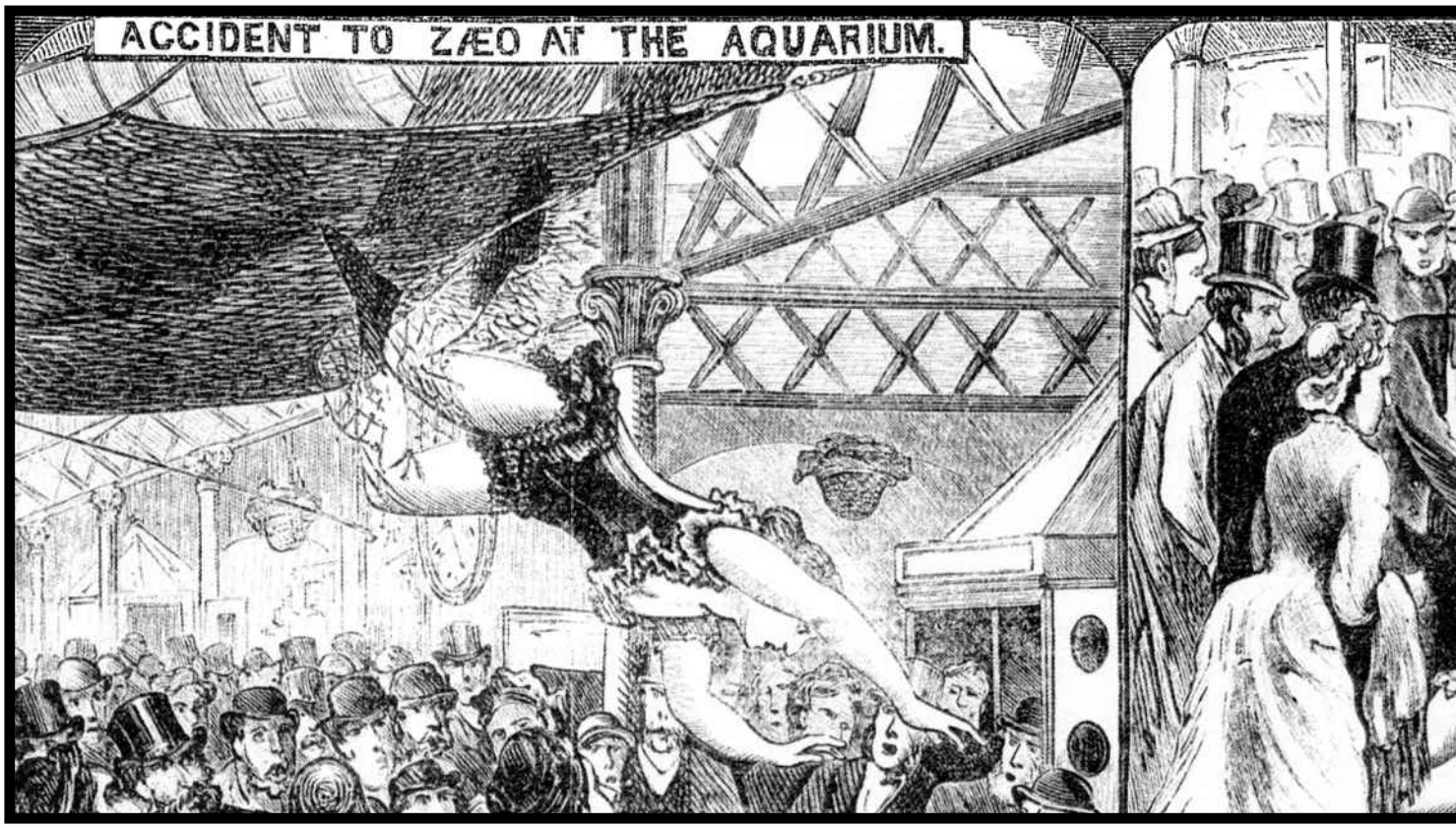
21. ZAZEL AND ZÆO



In April 1877, the bill-stickers of the Westminster Aquarium were pasting up some mysterious advertisements containing only the word 'Zazel'. There was much curiosity among fun-loving Londoners, and at the premiere of Zazel's performance, the Aquarium was completely full. She turned out to be a good-looking, scantily clad teenage girl who performed a most adventurous trapeze act, and walked the tightrope with the greatest skill. The climax of the performance was when Zazel descended into what looked like a large cannon. There was a loud bang and a cloud of smoke, and Zazel flew across the stage, landing safely in a huge net.

Nothing like this 'human cannonball' performance had ever been seen in London, and the newspapers were full of Zazel's exploits. Backed by several doctors, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police wrote to the manager of the Aquarium, querying whether it was right to expose a teenage girl to such a dangerous performance. The manager replied that Zazel had never had an accident, although she had been rehearsing her act for five years. Other doctors certified that her performance was not dangerous as long as the net was fully functional, and that even the cannonball stunt was not too severe a challenge to female physiology. In fact, the 'cannon' relied on a powerful spring rather than on explosives. Moralists complained that Zazel was not



TOP: Zazel is fired from a gun, from *IPN* 14 April 1877. **ABOVE:** Zæo has an accident at the Aquarium, from *IPN* 8 November 1879.

STRATED NEWS
EKLY RECORD

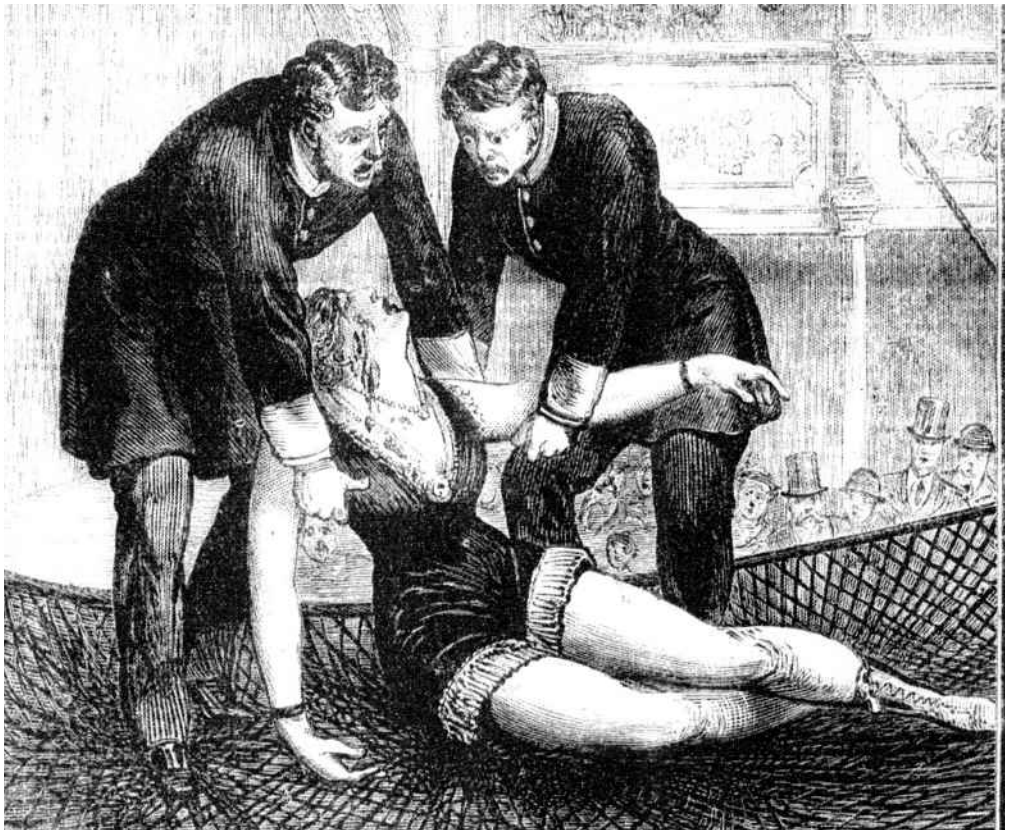
wearing much on stage, but the *Illustrated Police News* artist who depicted her in mid-air did not seem to mind.

Zazel remained at the Aquarium for nearly two years, being paid £125 a week. She was under the management of the impresario Mr Farini, who later took her on a tour of the provinces. In 1879, when performing in Portsmouth, the net broke and Zazel hit the floor hard; she was severely bruised, but resumed her tour a few weeks later, visiting Leeds, Sheffield and Dundee. At this time, a scruffy-looking German named Ernst Richter appeared in London, claiming that Zazel was his daughter Rosa Matilda. Richter had once trained and managed Rosa, he asserted, until the wicked Farini had stolen her away from him. The German tried various legal tricks to be reunited with his daughter, but since he was an unattractive-looking fellow, and since Zazel clearly wanted nothing to do with him, he was unsuccessful.

The void left by Zazel's departure from London was filled by another scantily clad female trapeze artist, Adrienne Wieland alias Zæo. Her act very much resembled Zazel's, including the use of a catapult in the *finale*. Although a skilful trapeze artist, Zæo was somewhat accident-prone. More than once, she injured herself or landing hard in the net. The newspapers were full of these incidents, with moralists suggesting that the lacerations to her back from hitting the net could have been prevented had she been decently dressed. Again, the *IPN* didn't mind at all: a semi-naked, bleeding female body descending through the air was just the thing to sell more copies of this particular newspaper.

In 1880, when a circus was performing in Leeds, a strong man caught a projectile supposed to have been fired from a cannon. He then offered a reward of £50 to any person in the audience who could repeat this feat. When a local youth accepted the challenge, he was struck hard on the head by the projectile and carried out in a coma. This deplorable incident led to the Dangerous Performances Bill being introduced. This outlawed obviously dangerous circus and music hall performances, and also curbed the activities of female trapeze artists. Zæo made an extensive tour of Europe, with considerable success, before returning to Britain in 1890. The Victorian 'moral majority' was outraged at the return of this foreign floozie, flaunting her flesh, swinging about in her trapeze, and inspiring lurid thoughts in the minds of innocent youths. Some rather lewd posters for Zæo had to be censored, because they showed her thighs. Nevertheless, she continued to perform throughout the 1890s, touring the country extensively. She died in 1906.

After her human cannonball act had become outlawed in Britain, Zazel went to the United States, where she joined Barnum's circus with considerable success, before a back injury sustained during a performance in New Mexico put an end to her career. She married Dr George Starr, the manager of the Crystal Palace, and lived on until 1937; a tiny, white-haired old lady who was proud of her adventurous youth.



ABOVE: Zæo comes to grief again, from *IPN* February 14 1880.

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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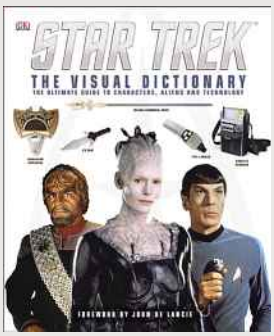

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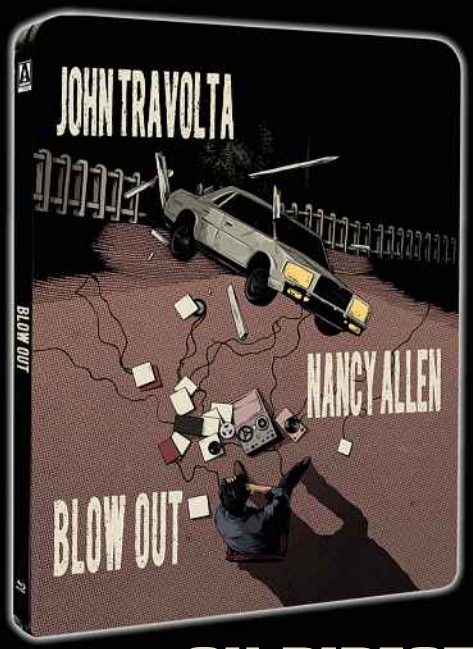

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